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# LATHEBY TOWERS.

A Pouel.

BY

### ALICE CORKRAN,

AUTHOR OF "BESSIE LANG."

"Meadows trim with daisies pied,
Shallow brooks, and rivers wide:
Towers and battlements it sees
Boson'd high in tufted trees,
Where perhaps some Beauty lies,
The Cynosure of neighbouring eyes."
L'ALLEGRO.

#### IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.





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## CLARA SAVILLE.

#### CHAPTER I.

"O, my friend!

These could not part us with their worldly jars,

Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;

Our hands would touch for all the mountain bars."

E. B. Browning.

For two days Clara enjoyed the hardening of her heart against the hidden interest that was lurking there. She rejoiced in the uprooting of it with some exaggeration of triumph, as if she had indeed freed herself from its coils.

It happened that on the third day she went out with Mrs. Saville, in the yellow vol. 11.

coach, to make some calls outside of Fareham. On their way home, glad of an excuse to escape from the glum, stuffy equipage, she got out to sort some wool for her mother's knitting at a shop in the village, saying that she would walk home.

It was a sunshiny afternoon. The children were trooping out of the village school, filling the air with clamorous rejoicing for deliverance from toil. Miss Saville, having completed her errand, was crossing the green, when her attention was attracted by laughter and shouts, the sound of which was that of mocking triumph rather than of glee. She saw a rabble of boys gesticulating and throwing sand at some object she could not at first perceive. When she came nearer, and standing, as she happened to be, on a slight eminence, she saw it was at Jimmy Hillier.

The witless lad was perched upon a stile; one hand was grasping a small pail filled with bright shells, and pebbles, and seagulls' feathers. His adversaries were trying to snatch it from him. His other hand was lifted above his head, and with it he was seeking to parry the blows and missiles they were aiming at him. The poor lad was uttering harsh, guttural screams, and on his foolish face there was an expression of terror and impotent rage. His assailants' cries only waxed the louder and merrier as he grew more frightened and enraged.

"The heartless imps! What can I do to deliver the poor wretch from their clutches!" muttered Clara. She paused, debating with herself for a minute. It was hopeless to seek to make her way through the throng of young fiends. She was putting her hand into her pocket, to take out and throw among the brood what silver and coppers she found there, in order to effect a diversion in Jimmy's favour, during which

he might make his escape, when she saw Cecil Latheby coming down the road with Simeon Hillier.

Her first impulse was to turn away; her next was to stay. She perceived she was not the only one who had seen him. The half-daft boy had slid down from his perch, and now, his body bent in two, his head thrust forward, still guarding it with his arms, he was with amazing rapidity making his way through the throng. He threw himself against Cecil, crying in shrill accents, "Save me, save me!"

It was not near his father, but near the blind man, that he sought refuge, she noticed.

"Why, Jimmy, my lad, what is it?" said Cecil kindly. At that moment the two leaders of the band rashly pursued their victim to his place of shelter. Cecil quietly laid hold of them, and having shaken them, deposited the heroes in the dust at his feet. At this summary measure the spectators were silenced; they were struck with wonder and incredulity at the rising up amongst them of this blind champion for Jimmy. Cecil turned towards them.

"What an unmanly, what a cruel act!—I would not have believed it of you! You, the sons of brave honest fishermen, to band yourselves together to frighten and hurt a weak boy!" He paused; then he resumed, more gently: "I thought you were of the right stuff, lads. I have heard of your spending nights on the sea, helping your fathers, facing the storms, behaving like men. And is it you who can find sport in teasing and mocking a lad who cannot defend himself?—who could not be a match for any one of you singly!"

The boys did not answer, but huddled together, casting scared, hang-dog glances at Cecil from under their eye-brows.

"Come, my lads," he resumed in a hearty tone, with a kind, pitying expression on his face; "follow my example; protect Jimmy. You ought to protect him as you would a baby-brother, or a little sister. Come along with me, Jimmy, now!" he went on, putting out his hand for the boy's. Jimmy was too frightened to move, and remained clinging to his protector. Then Cecil stooped, and with a laugh, tenderly lifted him, and laid him on his shoulder. It was an absurd but a pathetic picture—the blind young man going smiling down the road in the full glow of May sunshine carrying the idiot boy, a straggling crowd of lads following at his heels.

Clara looked after them. She did not know why, but a foolish tear came. She dashed it away.

"This then is the man! He never knew that I saw him," she said.

Fred was dining out that evening, and Clara was alone with her mother. She talked and tried to be merry, but a trouble was in her heart. The thought of her conduct to Cecil pursued her. She sought to put it away, as she had succeeded in doing those last two days, but she could not. memory of his bearing and of his words presented itself to her, and rebuked her. She remembered the lofty simplicity of his mien, as he repudiated the accusations she had lavished upon him. She saw him again, brushing away the tear that was the seal of truth to his words, and yet she had vouchsafed but a grudging reply. She saw him again, approaching her with a manly confidence in her magnanimity, and the expression of mortification replacing that bearing when she rudely repulsed him. A great regret seized her. She grew restless and unhappy. She determined to meet him once more, to remove the impression her conduct had made upon him.

The following day was Thursday — the day Cecil usually visited at the Welshams. Clara made up her mind to go to the studio, and meet him there. She went, but Cecil did not come.

Mr. Welsham needed but one more sitting to finish the portrait. Clara fixed one day, but sent a note to put off the appointment, and came unexpectedly on the following Thursday. Again Cecil did not come. As this last opportunity failed, the desire to meet him strengthened, and assailed her the more. Little Minnie was playing about the studio. Clara had been absorbed and silent some time. Suddenly, she sent Mr. Welsham out of the room to fetch her a glass of water. Then she took the child up, and put her on her lap.

"I am afraid, Minnie, I have sent away your friend, Mr. Latheby."

"He's coming next Saturday, I know. We're having potato-cake for tea; and I'm learning a new song for him," said Minnie.

"Minnie, you darling! How do you like these shining silver beads? There! I'll fasten them round your pretty white neck," said Clara, eager to distract the child's mind from Mr. Latheby before her father came in.

The stroke proved successful. Minnie was absorbed in the necklace when Mr. Welsham entered.

The next day was Mrs. Saville's birthday. Clara drove off with the portrait.

On the following Saturday, soon after four, a carriage drove up to the artist's door, and Clara stepped out. The servant who opened the door made a feeble protest; but Miss Saville insisted upon seeing Mrs.

Welsham. The poor lady received her with a distressed countenance.

"I have come to suggest a small alteration in my portrait. It will need but a few touches to make it, so I drove over with it," said Clara.

"Mr. Welsham is engaged. He has a visitor. To tell you the truth, Miss Saville, it is Mr. Latheby who is with him."

"Mr. Latheby?" repeated Clara. She hesitated; she even made a feint of retiring. Then she turned on her steps, and said: "If you will allow me, I shall go up to the studio all the same, after all:" she went on, giving a little shrug to her shoulders. "It is not Mr. Latheby, père, I shall meet, and I do not mind the son so much."

Mrs. Welsham murmured some inaudible reply, and with a ruffled brow followed Clara up the stairs, down which streamed the strains of the harmonium. The studio door was open. Clara stopped on the threshold. She saw Cecil at the instrument; the children were gathered around him. Johnny was performing an accompaniment on an airy violin, to the satisfaction of his brothers. Little Minnie was listening to the music with rapt attention, one hand tucked under her chin. Mr. Welsham was ensconced in an arm-chair, his eyes closed—smoking, and imbibing the music. "Orpheus in Bohemia," thought Miss Saville, with a little smile, as she watched the group.

Neville was the first to perceive Miss Saville, and shouted her name. Instantly Cecil ceased playing. He did not turn towards her at once, but remained where he was; then he rose.

The painter started up with a slightly annoyed expression.

"This is an unexpected honour, Miss Saville."

"There is a little alteration I would suggest to you in my portrait, Mr. Welsham. It has been seen and admired, but all opinions seem to be unanimous as to the need of this slight change. I drove over with it, taking my chance of finding you disengaged, and giving you another sitting."

Clara spoke with admirable self-possession, but her voice was perhaps pitched a semitone higher than usual.

"I am afraid—you see—I could not—to-day—Miss Saville. Any time to-morrow you may appoint."

"Do not let me prevent you, Welsham," said Cecil, from the harmonium. "I can go into the garden with the small folk."

"Thank you; but perhaps I had better leave," said Clara, with a little show of stiffness.

"You must not, on any account, have your drive for nothing, Miss Saville. I am the only obstacle to the sitting taking place. I can retire without any breach of hospitality on my friend's part," said Cecil, moving towards the door, surrounded by the children.

- "If Miss Saville had only dropped me a line," murmured the poor painter.
- "I shall not break up the party," said Clara, with decision. My vanity would not allow me to sit to-day. Mr. Welsham would ruin my portrait now that I have deprived him of his meerschaum and his music."
- "I am in a somewhat lazy mood, I confess," said Mr. Welsham, with an uncomfortable laugh.
- "Your energy will return when you take up your chalks," said Cecil, still moving towards the door.
- "I shall go, and come again to-morrow afternoon," said Clara, also going towards the door.

- "Indeed, you must not go," said Cecil, approaching it.
- "It is I who am the intruder; you the expected guest. It is I, therefore, who must go," she said, with cold politeness.
- "My friend will have plenty of my society after the sitting," replied Cecil.
- "But, you see, my portrait will be ruined if I stay," she said, with a little softening in her voice.
- "My sense of the barest courtesy due to a lady would be ruined if I were to stay," he answered.

There was a pause.

- "I can only see one way out of the difficulty," said Clara, brusquely.
  - "What is it?" he asked.
- "That we should both remain; that I should sit to Mr. Welsham, and that you should play to him."
  - "I think not. Painter and sitter had

better be left alone," he answered, with courteous decision, his hand on the knob of the door.

"No, Mr. Latheby; if one of us must leave, I shall leave," said Clara, in a voice of winsome gentleness.

A faint smile crossed his face. She thought it was one of pleasure.

- "I shall be very happy to play while you sit," he answered, turning back.
- "You shall be deprived only of your meerschaum, Mr. Welsham, if you will give me a sitting," said Clara, brightly.

The painter was but too delighted, and began to move about his studio, gathering his implements together. "Give the word of command when I am to begin, Miss Saville."

- "What shall I play?" asked Cecil.
- "You must play, and choose your theme as well. I am a barbarian. I have felt more touched, hearing the peasants in the Swiss

valleys singing the Ranz des Vaches, than listening, in a concert-room, to a great man executing a sonata of Beethoven."

"Children and barbarians are merciless critics," said Cecil, smiling. "They make no account either of associations or circumstances; they do not take into consideration the background to their emotions; they imperiously judge the result, good or bad, as it affects them."

"I am the typical barbarian; the result on myself is all I judge," said Clara.

"I am ready now—portrait on easel—sitter posed. If Miss Saville will let me choose, I ask for something old—Purcell—Carissimi"

"Oh, pre-Raphaelite soul!" said Cecil, laughing. "Beethoven is too modern for him. He only cares, Miss Saville, for what was written or painted before the world got clever—while it was yet sublimely simple."

It was easier to play and listen than to talk. Was it delight evoked by the naif grandeur of those old strains, whose chords are like the music of the elements?—or was it pleasurable triumph at having accomplished her ends, that filled Clara with a sense of calm satisfaction? That sense of repose deepened as Cecil played; through it ran an under-current of dreamy excitement, like a vague foregleam of what life at high tide might be.

"I wish I could attach you to my suite as my studio-minstrel, Latheby," said Mr. Welsham, when Cecil stopped, leaning back in his chair, and looking at Clara's portrait with half-closed eyes. "As you played, complexities of expression flitted over my sitter's face—I had only known its faint possibilities before. It would be a good speculation to have you as a sort of familiar you. II.

dæmon to call up what look I needed on my model's countenance."

"Oh! but I refuse to be played upon instead of played to," said Clara, blushing with returning self-consciousness.

"Yet that is what the singing of the peasants' Ranz des Vaches did. It played upon you, Miss Saville," said Cecil.

"Well, in that way, you played almost as well as they did," she answered.

"I think I have done," said Mr. Welsham, in a satisfied tone. "I know now how Leonardo got that inner smile on those women-faces of his. I'll wager some one was playing to them as they sat."

They fell to talking on music and painting. The talk was a little strained; there was in Clara's voice a certain thinness, perceptible in voices speaking of alien matters, when something that needs saying has not been spoken. She was beginning to fear she

would find no opportunity to place her cherished word of explanation, when chance favoured her. Mr. Welsham was called away. She at once walked over to the harmonium, before which Cecil was still sitting.

- "You made an explanation to me, Mr. Latheby, the other day—the day I met you in the wood. I left you rather coldly."
  - "No," he answered; "I did not think so."
  - "But I gave you no answer."
- "There was no need," he said; "you listened, that was all I asked."
- "But would you not like to know my convictions? You know we cannot, for family differences," she said, very slowly; "we cannot hold the position of friends; but—but—in common justice, I must tell you that I believed you—that my aversion is quite at an end."
  - "I do not ask for more," he said. "You

say we cannot be friends, Miss Saville. I am your friend. I may prove it to you; and then I do not think my friendship will seem so worthless to you as to throw it away."

"We are friends," said Clara. "I meant there are other members of my family. Their feelings are beyond my influence; and, you know, we may not meet as friends any oftener than we met when enemies."

"We shall meet," said Cecil. "Chance has wrought all this happy change for me. In my case, it was blind chance. I hope we shall meet again."

"I shall just ask you to make me one little promise. Don't tell people how we met," she said hurriedly.

He promised; and Mr. Welsham entering the room Clara took her leave.

#### CHAPTER II.

"But where ye feel your honour grip,
Let that aye be your border;
Its slightest touches, instant pause—
Debar a' side pretences;
And resolutely keep its laws,
Uncaring consequences."—Burns.

It became evident to Miss Saville, that if she wished indeed to know Cecil Latheby, she must take all Fareham into her confidence, and let the fact of their reconciliation be the subject of tittle-tattle at all the teaparties and the Dorcas meetings in the place.

Twice in the following week she met him at friends' houses. At the first he was giving a lesson; there they had scarcely exchanged a passing salutation, for the lady of the house hurried Clara away into another room. The second meeting had been of more

importance. Miss Saville had gone over one morning to the Rectory to bring her mother's subscription to some local charities. Mrs. Otway, believing her husband to be alone, showed Miss Saville into his study; there they found the Rector and Cecil Latheby together, discussing some old Gregorian hymns. Clara was conscious of something like a quiver passing through her from head to foot, but she remained perfect mistress of herself. She had looked and longed for this meeting almost unconsciously. She had not settled with herself what her plan of conduct would be towards Cecil before strangers. As soon as she found herself in his presence, under the eyes of lookers-on, who believed them to be enemies, she felt the complication of the position; yet there was a certain piquancy in the situation. Mr. and Mrs. Otway were embarrassed; she and Cecil behaved distantly to each other;

neither addressed the other directly, but neither showed the slightest inclination to leave. She had caught an unmistakable brightness pass over his face as she entered; his manner, however, had not betrayed any trace of emotion or embarrassment as he bowed to her, or joined in the conversation when appealed to by the Rector.

Miss Saville felt a pleasurable excitement; her cheeks burned; there was a little perceptible brusquerie in her tone and manner as she discussed parish matters with Mr. Otway. There was to be a treat for the school children in the fields. Clara was brilliantly benevolent and amusing in the plan she drew up for the entertainment. She was sincere in her wish to give the children pleasure, but she certainly talked a little for effect. To all appearances she was absorbed in the subject in hand, while all the time every sense was merged in the

consciousness of Cecil's presence and of the secret understanding between them. He was very quiet; he agreed to take a share in the entertainment; to tell a story or recite a ballad to the children. He pleaded engagements, however, that would prevent his doing more than take this slight part in the day's proceedings. He showed no eagerness to come forward, and avail himself of the opportunities she gave him, to take a more active share in the day's doings, which would have thrown him into contact with her.

There was a reticent gravity in his manner that perplexed her; she began to wish to ruffle it. It almost seemed as if he were ignoring the secret pledge of friendship they had given each other, and which she remembered so vividly.

The conversation turned on Fred's work among the labourers. Clara joined in Mr.

Otway's appreciation of it. There was a little ostentatious warmth in the way she praised her cousin's devotion to science, and the interest he took in the condition of the poor. Cecil showed no sign of emotion; he remained silent, and, if possible, the quiet of his expression and attitude deepened. She was piqued. The Rector was saying it was admirable to find a man like Doctor Raikes—rich, young—going through the drudgery of a profession with so much patience and devotion.

"It is," replied Clara, feeling a little cold, but speaking with deliberate emphasis. "He is practically self-sacrificing. There is nothing of the would-be hero about him. He goes to work in a straightforward, although it may be a prosaic, fashion. He does not let the opportunity slip of being renunciating; he does the right thing at the proper time."

She was sorry as soon as she had spoken.

Cecil understood that she was talking at him, and lifted his face towards her with an expression of astonished pain. Clara repented; she did not look at Cecil, but addressing Mrs. Otway, who sat near him, so that her voice was turned in his direction, she said softly:

"It now and then happens, however, that we meet with some whom we believe in without proof; whom we take on trust, as it were. We know, should the opportunity ever occur for them to make good that which they dream and long to do—we know that they will do it, and we feel towards them as if they had done it."

She did not remain long after making this speech, but it seemed to her as if by it she had made her peace with Cecil, and that the sense of mutual understanding and concord between them was restored.

"Of course, all Fareham will know that

we met and bowed to each other, and actually spoke," said Clara to herself as she walked rapidly home. She was strongly moved, and felt the need of physical exertion. "I wish it—I wish people to know that we have met. It will make it easier for me to know him—and I want to know him."

She revolved in her mind how she would tell her mother of this meeting; what subtle means she would use to remove Mrs. Saville's prejudice against the "Young Pretender." She wondered if she would be allowed to take lessons from him. Once she thought of winning Fred over to her side, but an instinctive reluctance held her back. When she reached home she found Mrs. Saville in no sympathetic mood. The hot weather made her irritable, and so Clara let the matter lie by.

In a few days Mrs. Saville was going up

to London for a couple of days to consult a physician there, and to see her lawyer. She was to be accompanied by Fred and her confidential maid. Clara asked to be left behind. The ostensible reason she gave, was the necessity for her presence at home to supervise the arrival and arrangement of some furniture coming from Paris for Mrs. Saville's morning-room. The real reason was that she felt loth to leave Fareham just now. She expected something to happen; something—but for the life of her she could not say what.

The gossip, Clara expected Fareham to indulge in, was set going this afternoon by the Rector, and the first person it reached was Mr. Latheby.

Mr. Otway met him in the lane behind the rectory, and in tones of mingled exhortation and congratulation he informed him that his son and Miss Saville had met that morning in his study. The young lady had manifested none of that irritation and ill-feeling which he so earnestly deplored to find existing between the two families. She had been affable. The Rector even fancied she seemed inclined to make advances of reconciliation. She had remained some time, and the conversation had been general and genial. Mr. Otway concluded by a fervent hope that should this be so, those advances might be met half way.

Mr. Latheby was in no mood to have a sermon preached to him. The tidings that Cecil had met Miss Saville in friendly intercourse stirred him keenly. It was evident that she seemed inclined to patronize. Open enmity between the two families kept up the old pride of position; but for the Lathebys to meet the Savilles' advances half way, was to accept to drink the cup of humiliation. Mr. Latheby felt himself grow

pale. Inventing some excuse by which he cut the interview short, he left the Rector, and made his way rapidly home.

On reaching the house, Mr. Latheby went straight up to the room Mary called the music-room, and which was Cecil's sanctum It was the airiest, prettiest room in the house. Every bright and tasteful object the devoted soul could lay her honest hands upon she brought thither—arranging them, dusting them; making the room cheery, as if critical eyes watched her care.

The brother and sister were together. Cecil was at the piano, striking chords, and dictating to Mary, who was writing the music down.

"What is this I hear?" Mr. Latheby said as he entered. "That you and Miss Saville have met and conversed on friendly terms!"

"Miss Saville came in as I was sitting

with Mr. Otway this morning, and she remained some time," answered Cecil quietly.

"Yes; and I am told that she actually deigned to be condescending," said Mr. Latheby, becoming more mellifluous in his anger. "That she seemed inclined to make advances. By George!—the publican's grand-daughter patronizing the Lathebys. How did she set about it, sir? Did she bob a curtsy, and offer you a glass of beer as a loving cup?"

"Miss Saville was simply courteous. She treated me as any lady might treat a guest she meets at a friend's house," Cecil replied, taking no notice of his father's jest.

"Courteous!" repeated Mr. Latheby, darting a questioning scowl at his son. "How amiable! How angelic!" Then he began promenading up and down the room. "What, sir! When such an opportunity offered to show some sense of what is due

to yourself and to your family—at the young lady's first caprice, to swallow at one gulp the sneers and the insults she has thought fit to heap upon us!—to stop, bandying polite phrases with her! By Jove, sir! If you had the spirit of a mouse, you would have risen at her entrance, and asked Mr. Otway to guide you out of the room."

"I had no wish to leave the room. I was desirous to remain, and to meet her," said Cecil, patting Mary's tender hand, that had found its way into his.

Mr. Latheby stopped, and wheeled fiercely round. "You wished to meet her! Do you know, sir, what such conduct implies? It implies, sir," he went on, with trembling restraint in his tone, "that you willingly accept the position she and her purse-proud mother would be enchanted to see you always holding."

"What position?"

"The position, sir, of a pitiful, penniless music-master!" shouted Mr. Latheby.

"Papa!" said Mary, trembling.

Mr. Latheby resumed his walk. He tried to keep up an appearance of dignity, as he chuckled: "What a triumph for the upstarts to see the descendants of the Lathebys teaching boys and girls to strum on the pianoforte. Perhaps, sir, you will be professor to a generation or two of their unborn brats! You'll go in by the back-door where your ancestors drove up to the front."

"I can understand," said Cecil, still speaking quietly, "that it should be painful to you I should pursue in Fareham the only profession open to me. I shall consider how I can leave it without ruin. I am known here, and the streets and roads are familiar to me." He paused; then he went on, with a change in his tone: "As for the position of music-master being a pitiful one, you. II.

I disagree with you. I achieve my independence by it. But on this question of position, I know how fatally we are at variance. In good faith, you would have me hold one that to me appears humiliating and disgraceful."

"Go on, sir; out plainly with what you mean!" said Mr. Latheby, as he paused.

"Will you not understand, father? Did I not tell you," answered Cecil, struggling to recover his calm, "when that unhappy lawsuit was pending, that I disagreed with you in the course you were taking. I told you then what I intended doing should you win your suit. With the forthcoming evidence I felt such a result was improbable. There appeared no need, to me, to make my purpose known to others."

"Go on, go on," fumed Mr. Latheby.

"I want you to understand, once for all, father," Cecil resumed, turning his face in

his father's direction, and speaking with incisive clearness, "that should the missing registry ever be found, or any further evidence come to light in your favour, inducing you to begin another lawsuit, I shall then publicly separate myself from the attempt to make an innocent girl suffer for a wrong done to us. Cannot you feel, father," he went on, with restrained energy, "the miserable humiliation to me, of appearing before this young girl in the light of setting myself up as rival-heir to the Towers?"

"Miserable, maudlin sentimentality!" broke out Mr. Latheby. "And may I ask, sir," he went on, trembling with suppressed emotion, "is Miss Saville apprised of your chivalrous intentions in her favour?"

Cecil was silent.

"Answer me, sir," roared Mr. Latheby.

"Are you and Miss Saville on friendly terms?

Has she cajoled you into this determination

publicly to withstand your father, when the opportunity to do it occurs?"

Cecil was slow to reply. He found it difficult to speak, remembering his promise to Clara not to divulge the circumstances of their first meeting.

"I have latterly met Miss Saville on two or three occasions. I think she understands—that she knows—that I shall never set up as rival heir to the Towers." Cecil spoke slowly, but with a certain concentration that conveyed more than his words.

A savage retort seemed hovering on Mr. Latheby's lips. He looked, for a moment, as if he could strike down his blind son—thus thwarting him by the calm strength of of a high purpose. Suddenly he turned away, without a word, banging the door after him. The element of pity, that entered so largely into the proud affection with which he regarded Cecil, had acted

unconsciously as a restraining influence on his passion.

Since the loss of the lawsuit, although Mr. Latheby kept up the appearance of the old, cheery philosophy; looked through his glass of thin claret after dinner with the air of a connoisseur; and donned his shabby shooting jacket with the jaunty carelessness of a country gentleman—yet he was a changed man. He had fits of silence apparently of moodiness; but there was no apathy in his moodiness. He had a certain eager, restless look; foreign to him in the old days. After Barbara's revelations, and after hearing the validity of his claims-set forth, argued, and eloquently pleaded by his advocate-Mr. Latheby hugged the idea of re-possession. All his mental energy ran in the one single channel of finding the means by which to vindicate his rights. At present, he saw no way to this but by discovering the registry of marriage. The righteousness and ultimate triumph of his claim had attained to the vividness of conviction. With the deepening hold upon him of this mania, his hatred of the present illegal possessors of the Towers had become intensified. They were the wrong-doers. His grandfather's injustice was overlooked.

To the casual observer, Mr. Latheby's habits were but slightly altered. Between the attacks of gout he was wont to take long walks. He still in a measure kept up this habit; but now his walks were not long. He went no further than the church. His afternoons were passed in that Octagonroom where the monk's library was stored. His counsel's opinion that the registry was not lost but hidden away, became the fixed idea of his life. The search for it had hitherto been fruitless; but he knew, and was ever hearing of, instances of long un-

availing searches for missing deeds being at last unexpectedly crowned with success.

Mr. Latheby felt that for him it was reserved to find that evidence. His mind became engrossed in subtle imaginings of possible places of concealment. It was probable that the detached page might be lying between the vellum leaves of one of those heavily-clasped volumes; perhaps it might be found between two pages, cunningly gummed together, or slipped inside the binding of some book. He remembered queer stories of concealment. The collection of MSS. was a large one, and increased the chances of the deed being overlooked in the search. Every day Mr. Latheby ascended the worn stone steps, and passed hours examining the pages written over with prayers and meditations. Every day he descended with the hope that had now become a monomania unfulfilled. Sometimes a sickening fear overcame him, that the registry was not here after all; that it might be lying stowed away in some corner of the Towers. In the ancient library there, he had heard there was a room filled up to the ceiling with old family records and accumulated pamphlets. Mr. Latheby would then turn over in his mind various means of entering the forbidden house. He calculated what bribe he could afford to give a servant to let him secretly enter while the family was away. The sense of right and wrong, the power of weighing the chances of the probable and improbable, were swallowed up in the supremacy of the reigning idea.

After leaving Cecil, Mr. Latheby walked away into the fields. He felt as if everything was turning against him. There was a conspiracy of fate to spoil his life. Was it not enough to have been robbed of his

rightful inheritance, but must he also be impeded in the endeavour to vindicate his right, by the hateful consideration that if he did establish it, it would be of no use? It did not occur to him any longer to doubt Cecil's resolution. He had evaded the thought of it before; trying not to acknowledge to himself the strength of purpose of that young mind, which insensibly towered above his. Now, he had detected in Cecil's tone, the influence of Miss Saville's attractiveness over him. This gave a sense of insuperableness to his objection.

"A foolish, contemptible sentimentality!" muttered Mr. Latheby. Then a certain self-pity filled him at the thought of his love for Cecil, of his pride in him, and his ambition for him.

"It is only for him I care to establish my claim to the Towers! It is only my desire to know that in time he will inherit and be

Lord of the old place, that I go through this weariness and heart-break of contending for my just claim—my righteous claim; and now, after having undergone little short of ruin for his sake, to be hindered and hampered. To be humiliated by hearing him declare that claim unjust."

Mr. Latheby fumed and pitied himself alternately for the cruelty of his position. Thwarted in his designs, all the energy of hope and endeavour frustrated, his life's affection held light by Cecil, in comparison with the regard of one who had wronged him on every occasion, Mr. Latheby felt utterly undone.

## CHAPTER III.

"Distress makes the lion behave like a fox."

Persian Proverb.

Some mornings after, Mr. Latheby first saw pass the waggonette carrying off Mrs. Saville's maid and some luggage—then he met the carriage of the Towers—the yellow vehicle, with the armorial bearings not half a century old, blazoned over it. He caught sight of Mrs. Saville reclining inside—wan, thin, imperious. On the seat was Clara's St. Bernard. The family was evidently going away. Mr. Latheby always drew freer breaths when such was the case, and Fareham was rid of the Savilles.

An hour after, Clara, having deposited her mother and Fred at the station, dismissed the carriage and set off walking homewards, with Bruno for escort. It was still early. There was a smell of hay in the meadows, that stretched grayly, shorn of their flowers. A little breeze stirred the sleepy warmth of June, and set the leaves, and their partners the shadows, languidly dancing to each other in the sunshine. She was pleased as usual to get out of the stuffy equipage and pursue her way on foot.

It was a long walk, so she chose the shortest way. It lay along a road, straight without compromise, sheltered by trees. There was not a turn or a break in it till within a few yards of Fareham; all communication with the adjacent fields and woods being cut off on either side by hedges and ditches.

Miss Saville had not long entered it, when she perceived a little way ahead of her Mr.

Latheby's back. They were apparently the sole pedestrians on the road, with the exception of a passing bucolic and some children, dropping curtsys to Miss Saville as she passed. The prospect of a long walk of enforced companionship amused Clara. The situation was comic. Two enemies trudging along with only a dusty strip of road between them, and no way of escape from each other's society for a good mile and a half, to say the least. When Mr. Latheby became aware of her presence on the other side of the way, Clara watched with immense amusement his attempts to preserve an appearance of dignified unconcern — his stiffened back, his firm look ahead, his gait that became a strut. Sometimes he lagged behind, sometimes he made a few precipitate steps forward. "I am sure the poor man thinks this is the long lane that has no turning," said Clara to herself.

The nervousness of Mr. Latheby's carriage was but the faithful transcript of his feelings. He would have liked to make his escape into the adjoining meadow, but dignity, girth, and gout, forbade the attempt to climb a hedge or clear a ditch. There was nothing for it but to go on.

Mr. Latheby's mortification was increased by the fact that, to all appearance, Miss Saville did not disquiet herself in the least. She pursued her way with even steps. Her composure was as exasperating as her dog's inquisitiveness; for Bruno occasionally darted to the other side of the road, and censoriously explored Mr. Latheby's calves.

"Unhappy education! This, I suppose, is feminine emancipation! Women to be allowed to peregrinate over the country alone, with a dog at their heels!" growled the angry gentleman.

After a while, a thought suddenly occurred

to him. Here, perhaps, was the long-coveted opportunity, brought about by Providence, to gain admission into the Towers, and have a hunt through the old books, and some other probable place of concealment, for that missing page of the registry. The resistance he met from Cecil did not in the least prevent Mr. Latheby's mind from still running in the old groove. The recollection of the violent abuse he had heaped upon his son, for talking to Miss Saville in friendly fashion, did not deter him from devising some hurried form of address with which to accost her. To achieve the great purpose of his life Mr. Latheby was not above picking up information likely to be useful to him from any quarter and by any means. Here, then, was a young girl whom he could perhaps conciliate and draw out by a little proper management. By dexterous diplomacy he might get out of her all he wished. Mr. Latheby was a man of the world, and flattered himself he knew how to deal with womankind. Mrs. Saville had left the Towers.

"I'll go in for it now. By the lord Harry, I will!" muttered Mr. Latheby. "When the cat's away the mice may play."

Clara soon noticed that the twitchings on the other side had ceased. Mr. Latheby was keeping pace with her. She glanced towards him almost against her will, and caught his eye. He lifted his hat; she answered by the slightest bend of her head.

Mr. Latheby crossed over. Bruno snarled an unflattering query; Clara looked up coldly, astonished, and did not pause in her walk. Mr. Latheby did not step on to the path, but kept on the road alongside Clara.

"Excuse me, Miss Saville, for accosting you," he said with suavity. "I have been

wishing for an opportunity to speak to you. Pardon me, if I take it when chance has laid our paths so close."

"What is it that you wish to say to me?" asked Miss Saville, with repellant brevity.

"To tell you the truth, Miss Saville, I want to ask you a favour," said Mr. Latheby boldly. "You may well look astonished! I know you think me no better than a highwayman, bidding your mother deliver up. Against this harsh judgment I protest. Youth is candid. You will admit there are two sides to every question. If you look at the case between us fairly, you will see we have certain rights. This property was handed over to the wrong heir, on grounds it was my duty to dispute. You, I am sure, can understand my position; I may be wrong; but, again, my claim may be right."

"The affair has been discussed before a vol. II. 22

law-court; I see no necessity to bring it forward here," said Clara, shortly.

"Quite so, Miss Saville," he replied with effusive hurry. "I have no wish to discuss the merits of my claim with you. It would be unjustifiable. I simply want to clear my position—I might say my character—before asking this favour of you. If you will look at the matter with the unjaundiced eye of youth, you will see that, in justice to myself, and as a duty to my son, I could not act otherwise than I did."

"I can appreciate, in some degree, your view of the case, Mr. Latheby," said Clara, with frank condescension. "On the other hand, you must appreciate ours, which is to resist your claim with all our might."

"Certainly; undoubtedly," he replied.

"It was as much your duty to defend your position, as it was ours to attack it. I am very happy," he went on, with an insinuating

bend of his head sideways, "that I have this opportunity of talking to a young creature—a charming young creature—who is without prejudice. I could never think of addressing your good mother like this. I should be out of court in a minute."

"Yes, you would," said Clara, bluntly, an amused gleam in her eyes at the thought of her mother's probable reception of Mr. Latheby.

"It is a pity," he resumed plaintively, "that there should be this terrible prejudice against me, on account of the unfortunate suit which was unavoidable, from my point of view. It debars me from much. Now, there is in the Towers a very curious collection of queer old folios—interesting to no one, perhaps, but to myself—some family records—chronicles; I should like to examine them." Then fearing he had said too much, he checked himself. "I am

writing a work relating to the family," he explained.

"Yes; I understand you are engaged on such a book," said Clara, who had heard of the great history.

"Those family records might prove of the highest value to me," continued Mr. Latheby.

"My mother is away for a couple of days. When she returns, I shall tell her of your wish, and of its purpose."

"I hoped to owe its courteous fulfilment to Miss Saville; I may add, I should prefer it," he answered, with another bow.

"We must wait for my mother's return," Clara said, decisively.

"Pardon me. There is a room—a room adjacent to the library—where, I understand, there is a vast collection of old tomes, valueless, perhaps utterly uninteresting, except to a Latheby; but antique volumes attract me,"

he resumed with cautious deliberation, casting a sidelong glance at Clara.

"Yes; there is such a room, or rather closet, piled up to the ceiling with books and pamphlets; some old engravings too. I peeped into one or two of the volumes. They seemed very uninteresting; one looked like an old account book, bound in vellum."

"How very curious! I have got a taste for what is old—I should much like to examine those archives," said Mr. Latheby, eagerly, feeling as if he were already handling the missing document. Then again he checked himself hurriedly—"You see, Miss Saville," he went on, with pardonable pride, "a rag of paper, when centuries have passed over it, is sanctified, as it were; a preciousness belongs to it. We beggared old nobles must apply this unction to our souls. What is brand new has its market value."

"It can be bartered and haggled over like cauliflowers," suggested Clara.

"Like a hot-house plant, I should rather say, Miss Saville. But the associations of an ancient aristocracy are inappreciable. They are beyond the pale of the auctioneer's hammer."

"I am a plebeian," answered Clara, meekly.

"What is stupid and ugly, still appears stupid and ugly to me, however old it may be. A washerwoman's bill is still a washerwoman's bill to me, if centuries have passed over it. I feel inclined to tear it np, or hide it, rather than put it under a glass case."

"I quite understand that this should be your feeling, Miss Saville," he replied, with huffy sarcasm. Then he veered round again to his starting-point: "I should like to enter that room. Every record of my ancestors is naturally interesting to me."

- "I shall ask my cousin, Doctor Raikes, to overhaul its treasures for you," said Clara, with some good-nature.
- "Doctor Raikes—does he interest himself in the library?" asked Mr. Latheby, lifting his eyes sharply on her.
- "He interests himself in everything; but the library is his special department. He is a book-worm," said Clara, who began to be amused by her companion's persistent questions.
- "But that room—those old books—they cannot interest him," said Mr. Latheby, nervously.
- "Anything in the shape of a book attracts him. He is the soul of order; and he likes to do everything himself. I dare say he has examined every book and pamphlet in it, by this time," answered Clara, with a little malicious enjoyment of Mr. Latheby's evident uneasiness.

Mr. Latheby breathed hard—the doctor might have come across the page and destroyed it. He was silent a minute; then he concealed his anxiety under the suavity of his demeanour. "If gossip is to be trusted, Miss Saville," he said, "I understand I ought to offer you my congratulations."

- "For what?" asked Clara.
- "It is reported in Fareham—it is the talk of the county—that Doctor Raikes will ere long hold the position of future Lord of the Towers."
- "A phrenologist would detect in you an abnormal bump of faith, Mr. Latheby, if you believe a country town's reports," she answered.
- "It requires no great effort of belief, Miss Saville, to credit that anybody may become Lord of the Towers, now-a-days," said Mr. Latheby, with a profound inclination of his

head, and inwardly rejoicing in the aptness of his sarcasm.

- "Anybody that I wish to make so," she answered, with a flush, and the mien of an offended queen.
- "Just so—just so," mumbled Mr. Latheby, utterly collapsed.

Miss Saville's words had hit his most sensitive feelings. As the weak old aristocrat walked by her side, he was so vexed, that for the moment he forgot his wish to enter the forbidden house, in his desire to lower her pride a little.

- "How is your son?" asked Clara, abruptly.
- "He's well enough," growled Mr. Latheby, not lifting his eyes from the ground.
- "I had the pleasure of meeting him a day or two ago, at Mr. Otway's," she said.
- "So I heard," he answered, gruffly. He detected by her tone that she wished to make a distinction between him and Cecil.

"There goes one of his *protégés*," said Clara, pointing to Jimmy, who shuffled past, dragging his legs behind him, and carrying his child's pail and spade.

"My son's a fool!" said Mr. Latheby.

"Why? Because he protects poor Jimmy?"

"Because he's the silliest of all dupes.

Madam—the silliest—the dupe who deceives himself. My son, Miss Saville, sets up a care-crow of an idea—which he calls Honour—and he flutters about it like a frightened rook."

"To obey that scare-crow, however, he may consider his duty," she said.

"A man's duty is to stand by his rights, Miss Saville. Stand by them to the death—to the death, if need be. It was so in the old days," he answered, with a look that gave savage meaning to his words.

"That may be; but perhaps your son believes that he has inherited from his ancestors some rights, if he has lost those of property. I have read the Latheby Chronicles; and I know that there were some of them who sacrificed tangible good for an idea. There was Sir Basil, who died for his king—that was for an idea. There was Sir Charles, who gave up to his tenants certain rights that he considered harsh and illegal for a man to hold over others. That was paying homage to that scare-crow, Honour. These examples may influence your son."

Something in her tone struck the wily elderly gentleman by her side, and set him pondering.

"You're right in that, Miss Saville. He's a Latheby, every inch of him. But, my dear young lady, what is honour and glory in a castle, may mean bankruptcy in a cottage."

"And also," said Clara, with a laugh and

a blush, "in this money-worshipping century, ideals are out of place. They, too, belong to the good old times."

"I detest ideals; they are the strongest motive powers to ruin," said Mr. Latheby; "but, when I listen to my son," he went on artfully, "the lad almost makes me feel as he does."

They had approached Fareham now. The village lay in the valley at their feet. The road branched off here.

"This is my way," said Clara, pointing to a short cut across meadows, leading to the Towers. "I shall wish you Goodmorning here."

"Good-day, Miss Saville," said Mr. Latheby, with a grand bow and a flourish.

Clara paused, hesitated, then said abruptly:

"You mentioned a report current in the village concerning me. I mean—me and my

cousin. I authorize you to contradict it, Mr. Latheby, whenever you hear it."

Without waiting for a reply, or for another bow, she turned and left him. Mr. Latheby went musing homewards.

Since the day Cecil had openly avowed his opposition to his views, a germ of thought had gradually sprung up in Mr. Latheby's mind, upon which it unconsciously worked. A tone in Miss Saville's voice now stimulated that astute gentleman's intellect into more active exercise. From this activity was born an idea - a sudden, astounding, resplendent birth—that bore no apparent resemblance to its progenitors in Mr. Latheby's dark broodings. It differed from them as the debonnair god of love differs from sinister-eyed hate. Mr. Latheby turned away from the contemplation of this newborn idea when it first presented itself. After a while he glanced at it unwillingly;

then with half-averted thoughts entertained That afternoon Mr. Latheby went in the direction of the Towers. The portalgate stood open to let in some vans of furniture. He looked about nervously to see no one was watching, then he plunged his eyes into the vista of sward and avenues leading up to the grey house, reposing in the light and tranquillity of a June afternoon. The verdure and opulence of the ancestral home acted like a spell. He lingered about and looked till the dream that had entered his soul expanded, took distinct form, and floated a full-sailed argosy into his mind. "By the lord Harry!" he muttered to himself: "If that's the only way to get it, I'll get it that way! I'll not stand like a dog whining outside. The girl's not so distasteful; I could swallow her if I got the old place in the gulp."

At dinner that evening Cecil detected an

indulgence in his father's tone towards him that had been missing since the scene between them. When Mary left them there was a short silence. Mr. Latheby rolled a cigarette; then, with his eyes sharply fixed on Cecil's face, he said in an unruffled, conversational tone:

"From what you saw of Miss Saville at Otway's the other morning, you think she is disposed to be friendly."

A gleam of emotion rapidly passed over Cecil's face.

"I think," he replied, "that she is sorry for the antagonism so long existing between the two families, and would perhaps like to bring about a reconciliation. I fancy she has some regret."

"You have met her, you say, on two or three occasions," resumed Mr. Latheby, still warily watching his son. "How did she impress you?"

- "She has a pleasant voice," said Cecil, quietly.
- "Does she carry any of the jingle of the nouveau riche about her?"
  - "Not the remotest echo of it."
- "And you think she would like the two families to be on visiting terms, eh?"
- "I think, perhaps, she might wish it, if she had only herself to consult," said Cecil, slowly. "But she cannot answer for her mother's feelings. It would be impossible to bring about a reconciliation, should no advance come from us."
- "What kind of advance?" asked Mr. Latheby, beginning to walk about the room.

A quick pallor passed over Cecil's features; he turned his face eagerly in his father's direction.

"I think," he said, "a letter should be written to Mrs. Saville, in which it shall be distinctly stated that we waive our claim to the Towers. That we recognize my granduncle's sale of it as legal; and finally declare, that if we find the missing registry, we shall simply use it as an instrument to vindicate the honour of our ancestress."

"What is the use of writing such a letter? If the registry were found, and we repented, it would not be worth a fig in a court of law," said Mr. Latheby fiercely, snapping his fingers; "and the old lady knows it."

There was a pause.

"It would be, as far as regards my intention, as if it were a parchment, sealed, docketted, and legalized, by every necessary formula of law," said Cecil.

"Well, perhaps, I'll consider it," replied Mr. Latheby hurriedly, in a changed tone, looking at his son.

"But I wish you did it now, father," said
Cecil, with emotion. "You don't know the
miserable humiliation of appearing in the
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false position in which I now stand in this young girl's eyes."

"You'll have all the honour and glory of it; I'll have none of it," said Mr. Latheby. "And, after all," he went on, with a touch of mournful sincerity; "your renouncing the claim is like my renouncing it. I have no care for the old home but that it may pass to you. I have longed and toiled to win it back that you may be heir to it."

"Then, father, why not care as much for the feelings with which I regard the transfer of the place, as for your own affectionate pride to see me inherit it?"

"I've thought over what you said the other day. I do not wish to force you into a position you condemn," said Mr. Latheby quickly. "But it's a deuced hard thing you're asking me to do—a deuced hard thing," he went on, laying his hand on Cecil's shoulder.

"Believe me, father, it is the only manly and honourable course to take in the matter; and after you've wrenched out of your heart the hope and thought of recovering the inheritance, you will be glad you have done it."

"It is a deuced hard thing to do for all that," repeated Mr. Latheby. "You are not practical or worldly wise, Cecil. You take after those of your ancestors who sacrificed life and wealth for an idea."

"This cannot be said to enter into the category of the ideal. We must not cackle over our goose as if it were a swan," said Cecil, with a smile. "It is simply adhering to the conditions of a bargain made by a member of our family."

"And you also, Cecil, wish us to be on visiting terms with the family at the Towers?"

Cecil seemed to feel his father's keen

glance resting upon him. He moved uneasily; then he said, with some difficulty, balancing his words:—"It is not likely there ever will be an intimacy—a formal call is all that is necessary; but I should be glad there were an end to this enmity—to every appearance of animosity. The one essential point is to set ourselves right—to make our position clear—before the Savilles—and all Fareham."

Mr. Latheby looked sharply at his son; there was some anger in his glance, but he merely said:

"I'll think about it. It's a deuced hard thing you're asking me to do—a deuced hard thing—yet I'll think about it."

## CHAPTER IV.

"Tis in the ruling passion. There alone
The wild are constant and the cunning known,
The fool consistent, and the false sincere.
Priests, princes, women—no dissemblers here:
This clue once found unrayels all the rest."

Pope.

Mr. Latheby was up betimes next morning, before his household was stirring, inditing the letter he had half promised Cecil to write. It was a difficult task, and he needed silence to do it in. The accomplishment proved more difficult and laborious than it had seemed in anticipation. By keeping steadily in view that this manœuvre was a diplomatic figment on his part, Mr. Latheby managed occasionally to scribble a few lines with pompous deliberation. Then the pen would drop from his hand, and he would tear into

a hundred fragments the paper on which he had been writing, and rise trembling and flushed from his chair, with a muttered oath.

In countenancing Cecil's renunciation of the ancestral estate, Mr. Latheby felt as if he were smiting the root of the tree which, to see re-blooming, had been the one object of his hopes, of his very life. "By Heaven! I will not, and I cannot do it;" he muttered again and again. Then again Mr. Latheby paused to consider the plot he was laying, and all the chances for its success. He thought of Cecil's resolve; also of the probable destruction of the registry; and once more he set himself to the task.

By breakfast the letter was written, and lay folded in its envelope. Mr. Latheby said nothing to his children about it; during the meal he sat silent, his face hidden behind the newspaper. When Cecil had set off on his daily round of lessons, Mr. Latheby went up to his room, hung up the shabby shootingjacket on the peg behind the door, and took down the well-brushed, thread-bare frockcoat, only donned on special occasions. Then, with a determined air, he deliberately set off in the direction of the Towers.

The wife of the lodge-keeper, who happened to be in charge, stared as he sauntered up, and announced his wish to go up to the halldoor, to leave a note for Mrs. Saville.

It was the first time Mr. Latheby had entered the forbidden grounds; and as he walked up the avenue every step woke the echoes of the past. He had scarcely entered, when he would fain have turned back. He could have sat, like Marius, among the ruins, with a pleasing bitterness; but there were no ruins—all was well-ordered and beautiful; and an aching, jealous chill crept over his heart, as the alien brightness and grandeur of the old home burst upon him. For all those

years he had fancied himself, in some sense, the owner and master, and imagined things had stood still, and all was as it used to be when the Lathebys were Lords of the Manor. For the first time he realized, in all its crudeness, that the old race was dispossessed; that he was a stranger—all his cut off. Mr. Latheby felt a momentary faintness, but at once he overcame or concealed his feelings.

He had perceived Miss Saville. She did not see him. As she strolled forward, in her white dress and garden hat and gloves, a basket of flowers slung over her arm, her long shadow going before her on the sunny lawn, she appeared to him a jarring image of worldly prosperity. To a less envious beholder, the image would have appeared softened by an unwonted touch of wistfulness in the weird grey eyes, and a little drooping about the corners of the mouth.

When Clara beheld Mr. Latheby coming

towards her, an unmistakeable beam of pleasure brightened her countenance. She instantly repressed it, and stood still, in an attitude that was in itself a cold question.

Mr. Latheby always derived a consciousness of moral support on momentous occasions, by remembering that George IV. had said that no man at Court took off his hat with the air that Sir Montagu Latheby did. He now made a bow that would not have disgraced that defunct nobleman, and stood bare-headed and rather pale before Clara.

"You are surprised to see me, Miss Saville," he said. "I come here to perform a duty."

"A duty?" she repeated.

"To my son. I come to present him in his true light before Mrs. Saville," Mr. Latheby went on. He could hardly speak from a nervous chattering of his teeth, and he clutched his hat tightly in his hand. "It is but due to him that she should be made aware that he distinctly separates himself from all attempt to win back the old estate."

"My mother is away—you cannot see her; not to-day, I mean," said Clara, in a kind tone. The mission of her guest pleased her. His visible emotion moved her; yet she felt inclined to laugh at the pompous artificiality of his manner.

"I have brought a letter with me. I left it open for you to glance over, Miss Saville, If you approve of it, I will forward it," said Mr. Latheby, fumbling in his breast-pocket, and drawing out an envelope, with the Latheby crest and motto—" Toujours Vaillant"—impressively stamped upon it. "Our conversation yesterday has emboldened me to hope, Miss Saville, that perhaps you will give it your support. Your mother then may read it favourably. Indeed," said

the wily gentleman, with artful pathos, "she may believe in the sincerity of my son's purpose. If he has inherited nothing else, he has inherited his ancestors' sense of honour—that made their word stable as an accomplished deed."

"May I read it?" said Clara, taking the missive, and looking at Mr. Latheby.

He made another superb bow.

She drew the letter out; it ran thus:

## " MADAM,

"It is for the vanquished to sue the successful. Thus I address you. If we live in the past through our ancestors, we live in the future through our children. They weave the thread of destiny for us. My son has declared to me his intention to accept and abide by all the consequences of the late Sir Peter's sale of the Towers—illegal though it may yet be proved to have been. Should the marriage registry be found that will lift the bar-sinister from our

branch of the family, and establish us in our true position in the direct line, he will still acknowledge the legality of your possession, by right of purchase, and relinquish his claim of heirship to the estate in favour of you, madam, and of your descendants. Before the decision of one whose strength of purpose I can appreciate, I am powerless. So to speak, I strike my flag. Accept my submission, madam. Let Fareham witness our reconciliation.

"I remain, madam,
"Your obedient servant,
"H. LATHEBY."

"Do you wish me to deliver this to my mother?" said Clara, repressing a smile at the inflated style.

"On second thoughts, I think it had better be left for her, on her return; but may I ask you, Miss Saville, to be its advocate when it arrives?"

"Yes; I promise. I ought to be its

advocate; for I, too, misunderstood your son. I, too, was unjust to him," she said, with a blush, yet eager to make this little atonement.

Mr. Latheby made another bow, and took note of the blush.

"I wish for a reconciliation also," Clara resumed, in a somewhat embarrassed tone, because I am tired of the relative attitudes of the two families being for ever discussed and watched, and made the subject of the tittle-tattle of the Fareham tea-tables."

"The village will miss its chronique scandaleuse," agreed Mr. Latheby, with a ghastly smile. "If the unhappy feud be buried, I trust, Miss Saville, you will sometimes honour my house with your presence. I think I may promise you will find in the Dower House the culture, the refinement, the love of art, that may be some set-off for its lack of wealth."

"I know I shall," said Clara.

There was a tone of conviction in her voice that was not lost upon Mr. Latheby. It gave him courage to effect a coup de main. He hesitated; then he said in a voice of inquiring simplicity, but with a perceptible quiver about the eyelids,

- "You are alone, at present, Miss Saville?"
- "Yes; alone till to-morrow."

Again he hesitated. "You must be lonely. A fair captive in a beautiful prison. If it did not appear too bold a request, I would ask you, as a seal of the alliance between us—for it is an alliance, is it not?—to come and spend this evening with us. My daughter would be happy to receive you, Miss Saville."

"This is hurrying on negotiations of peace to a crisis," she said, laughing at the audacity of the proposal. "How can I come? My mother does not know that I have ever

exchanged a word with any member of your family."

"But with you for an advocate, Miss Saville, I entertain no doubt of the future altered relationship between out two families. Your visit this evening would be but the first of many others, I trust."

"No, I cannot for the present accept your invitation," said Clara. Still decisive as her tone was, an expression of hesitating pleasure in her eyes encouraged him.

"My son would play for you. I am not much of a judge of music myself, but I understand from those who are that his music is worth hearing."

She smiled at this.

"You might come, unescorted, towards dusk, and I shall escort you back. Let it be a secret visit. Until the two families be reconciled—a reconciliation due entirely to your mediation—there is surely no absolute

necessity yet to tell Mrs. Saville. The end in view would surely justify a little evasion at present."

"Oh," said Clara, with a smile that had something forlorn in it: "I shall not be very strictly questioned as to my goings and comings. I am by no means hedged round with watchfulness."

"Come, then, Miss Saville—as to friends. When you know my son better, you will feel he is worthy of your friendship," Mr. Latheby continued, with cordial insistance.

Clara did not answer, but an expression of pleasant contemplation brightened her eyes. She wished to know Cecil. There was a piquancy in the proposal that attracted her.

"I do not see how I can come," she said, hesitating.

"It will be sealing the bond of peace between us," said Mr. Latheby.

"Well, perhaps, I may—but say nothing about it. Let it be a secret between us until I come, for I may not be able, you see."

"It shall be a secret between us," said Mr. Latheby, who had an obvious reason for agreeing to this request.

There was a renovated grandeur in Mr. Latheby's manner as on his way home he entered the confectioner's and fruiterer's shops, and ordered the best they contained. Money was at a lower ebb than usual at the Dower House just now, but he gave his commands as if he had Fortunatus' purse.

When Mr. Latheby left her, Clara wandered about the grounds, debating with herself whether she would go or not go to the Dower House. The recklessness and secretiveness of the proposed proceeding amused and excited her. Then there was at work that growing longing to know Cecil more, to watch him and understand him. She could vol. II.

not make up her mind what she would do-Yet she arranged with herself how she would proceed, in case of accepting the invitation. She had taken tea with some friends the evening before. To-night she would not dress herself less becomingly, because she must proceed on foot. would hide her finery under a long cloak. "I shall feel like a conspirator," she said, laughing to herself, and throwing away some leaves she had abstractedly been twining into a wreath. She would say nothing to her maid as to her intention of going out after dinner. On setting off she would merely tell Peter she was going to see some friends. She might be detained, but as she was sure of an escort home she would not need the carriage.

## CHAPTER V.

"But O, she is a witch indeed!
She carries still a vial precious,
Fill'd with a balsam so delicious,
As shames the draught of Ganymede."

Goëthe.

Mr. Latheby, at their early dinner, said nothing of an expected guest to tea. It was one of Cecil's busy days with his pupils, but when he had left the house and Mr. Latheby found himself alone with Mary, after some mysterious hems and haws, he broached the subject that weighed on his mind.

"My dear Polly," he said, with the glib indifference of one accustomed to give entertainments every day, "will you see that everything is particularly nice this evening? I expect some one to tea, and have ordered a few things home, as I should like a slight supper to be ready after."

"Some one to tea and supper! What an event! Who is it, papa?" asked Mary.

"Event! Why should it be an event?" answered Mr. Latheby, testily. "There is no need that I should tell you who it is. I only beg that you see that everything is as it should be."

"But, papa, why may I not know who it is? Do tell me! I shall be devoured by curiosity the whole day."

"I am astonished, Polly, at your speaking in this way. No; I shall not tell you. What, child, can't I give an invitation to tea without rendering an account to you? I am expecting some one—let that suffice; and I request that everything be in the best order our means will allow." With this, Mr. Latheby departed, in all the triumph of his mystery.

"Who can it be?" pondered Mary, clasping her hands and drawing in her breath. Since the loss of the lawsuit, the modest hospitalities of the Dower House had been entirely suspended.

By six o'clock, the preparations for the mysterious guest were all made. Mary put such an abundance of flowers on the table that the lack of plate was not depressing. If there were darns in the snow-white table-cloth, the fairy stitches seemed part of the warp and woof of the texture. On the side-board, beside the decanted port and sherry, stood two bottles of champagne, gorgeous in their silver neck-cloths and gilded foil. The dingy room, with portraits of the Lathebys hanging round, looked pathetically bright now that the last touches had been given to it, bright, with the brightness of threadbare old age, brushed up for one day's jollity.

The only member of his household Mr. Latheby took into his confidence was their single in-door servant, Elizabeth—a grim, angular-elbowed damsel, somewhat domineering in her ways, but shrewd and faithful as a collie-dog. She had been in his wife's service, and still remained in his after the loss of the lawsuit obliged him to part with Elizabeth considered the other servants. herself a member, albeit an humble one, of the Latheby family. Soon after her arrival at Fareham, Peter, of the Towers, who had watched her from the servants' pew at church, and dodged her, whenever occasion allowed, in the village shops, began to make tender advances to her. But she silenced his gentle addresses by the plain rejoinder that no Latheby and Saville could ever be joined together in holy matrimony. pointing, with a summary gesture, to the Towers: "Go yer way," she said. "I'll not

say it's not a grand way, through no end of trees and houses, but I'll ha' nothin' to say to a man who fancies his what belongs by right to other folks, and been theirs for hundreds and thousands of years."

Elizabeth, after being told the name of the expected guest, was more abrupt and grim in her ways and aspect, but she worked, as she knew how, to get things ready. Now, in a stiff white apron and old black silk dress, she looked as if she headed a retinue of servants. Mr. Latheby had donned his dress coat, and a gorgeous ruffled shirt. With this change of costume he assumed the society manners of his ancestors up in the frames yonder. He moved with measured steps, and courteously bent his head in addressing Elizabeth or his daughter. Mary had thought her toilette complete when she put on her pretty brown silk best dress, and fastened in her dark hair a

creamy gloire de Dijon rose, fresh culled from the garden; but her father bade her put on some of her mother's lace and jewels. Mary ran up to obey; the day's excitement had brought the warm blood to her cheeks; she was inclined to take her mystification merrily. Out of the old-fashioned sets she chose a quaint pair of topaz ear-drops, set in Indian gold, and a brooch to match.

"Now I feel like a pedlar, wearing all the contents of my pack. I wonder if there is anything else I might deck myself with for the occasion—an Indian shawl, or a plume."

She was conscious, as she bent forward before the mirror, of a thrill of pleasure at the sight of her own reflection. But she did not pause a minute longer than was necessary to wind the lace scarf artistically about her pretty trim figure, and pin the brooch straight. The delight in admiration,

innate in women, had not yet been stirred in her. She still put away from her the possibility that the world of gladness and beauty, even the more familiar one of pain, could affect her otherwise than it affected Cecil. She was no separate individuality. She was still simply her brother's eyes.

When she heard his step in the hall she ran down to meet him, and poured out the story of the afternoon's preparations for the reception of a mysterious guest.

- "And now behold me, Cecil, in sheen of jewels, silk, and lace."
- "You look like a queen," he said, smiling, passing his fingers over her.
- "A gipsy queen, you mean! But oh, Cecil, can you guess? Have you the faintest, dimmest, remotest idea of who our guest is to be?"
- "No; unless it be the new curate, I cannot guess."

"It cannot be the curate. Although he be the nephew of a bishop, should I be ordered to put on my lace and jewels to receive a curate? No; it is not the curate."

"It must be the Duke of Gresham," said Cecil, with a laugh, and a look of inspiration. "No one but the Duke would be held worthy of such preparations."

"Oh!" cried Mary, letting her hands drop with a little gesture of dismay. "It must be the Duke! I wish it were the curate."

"Why should you wish it were the curate, pet? The Duke is an old friend of our family. Why should we not be glad to welcome him. Is it because we are poor?" said Cecil, with a smile, putting his hand under her chin, and giving the little face an affectionate squeeze.

"But you see, Cecil, the Duke is accustomed to footmen in plush and powder; and the thought of Elizabeth opening the door

for him and handing him a cup of tea, fills me with consternation."

"You troubled wee housewife! It is the true gentleman who would overlook deficiencies. Now, if it were the solicitor or the apothecary we expected, we might feel disgraced if things were not done in grand style. Poor little pet!" he went on, drawing her hand into his arm as they walked into the drawing-room. "Do things then, about her, begin to look so poor, shabby, and vulgar?"

"No," replied Mary emphatically, yet with a little falter in her voice; "nothing vulgar. Some look as if they had seen better days."

"Does the room carry our poverty written plainly everywhere—on the curtains; on the walls?" asked Cecil.

It carries a respectable and venerable aspect. From the walls our ancestors look

down upon us. The curtain-folds are full of dignity. The chiselled frame of the Venetian mirror looks three centuries old. The only things of yesterday in the room are the flowers." Mary spoke playfully, still with that little falter in her voice. All she said was true; but she did not tell him that the sun of many summers had made the colour fade and was putting the dust into the curtains and carpets; and that her deft fingers had put many a patch and darn where it would be difficult for him to find them.

"Then, welcome the Duke," said Cecil, with a laugh. "We are poor, but we do not exhibit our poverty! Now, I shall go up to dress to receive his Grace; I dare say we shall soon hear his carriage-wheels rumbling up."

Cecil had not been down many minutes, when he said: "Listen, Mary, I hear a light step coming quickly up the gravel walk. It is not the step of a gouty Duke."

Mary sprang forward to catch a glimpse of the approaching guest, but the lace scarf catching in a chair, she stayed to detach it. When she reached the window the visitor had passed under the over-hanging porch.

"I see the folds of a dark cloak," said Mary, craning her neck. "I can just see it vanishing behind the jessamine. It has a heavy, frumpy look. Oh dear! I hope it is not Miss Beales, and that I have not bejewelled myself in vain."

A minute after there entered the room, on Mr. Latheby's arm, not a gouty Duke, or a dowdy school-mistress, but a young lady fresh, bright, and beautiful. Mary could have thought a sunbeam had walked in. All at once the furniture looked shabby; the patches seemed to stand out in relief; there was such a contrast between her buoyant brightness and the dingy setting around. She wore a gleaming dress and crimson roses in her bosom. Mary felt in her lace and jewels as if she were indeed a pedlar, adorned with the contents of her pack. What fairy was this, in the likeness of Miss Saville, her father had conjured up?

"My daughter—Miss Saville; my son you already know!" said Mr. Latheby, waving his hand with an ancestral bow. Mary was so astonished, her sense of humour was so roused by the discovery that all the day's preparations were to welcome a member of the proscribed family, that, divided between surprise and laughter, she could not find suitable words of greeting to their guest.

Miss Saville, frankly, without a trace of patronage, met her young co-eval, Mary, shook hands with Cecil, whose greeting was silent, and whose face had changed at her entrance; and then she turned and occupied herself with Mr. Latheby. Perhaps she found it easier to talk to him; perhaps she resolved to charm him. A look of interest was in her pretty eyes, the under lid slightly raised with a lurking smile, as, like two lode stars, they were fastened on her host. A deeper tinge of red was in the clear brown cheeks, and a frank unaffected good cheer about the corners of the mouth. Figure and face equally charming! Was it the pretty French dress?—was it the simple coil of hair?—was it the girlish ease of every movement?—there was that about her, indeed, to make a stripling moon-sick, and even an elderly gentleman uncomfortable.

Miss Saville had just delighted Mr. Latheby by observing a likeness between him and the stalwart Sir Montagu, when Elizabeth announced that tea was served in the dining-room. During that meal Mr. Latheby exhibited all the indifference of blue blood; he neither praised nor abused the delicacies heaped upon his table; he was in his element, and his dress-clothes never so well became him.

A silk dress rustled near and touched Cecil. He was reserved and silent, but he was all ears. The voice beside him was fresh and frank; he caught himself listening for certain inflexions in it that he already knew. He could tell to a nicety when that voice was directed to his father, to Mary, and to himself; he knew also when the motion of the hands accentuated the words. Miss Saville spoke of her travels; she had been to Paris, to Rome. She displayed powers of observation; a happy knack also of hitting off in a few words an original and picturesque description. There was a certain piquancy in all she said. Before tea was over, Cecil

began to notice a slight tone of suppressed banter when she addressed his father. was drawing him out, and Mr. Latheby had snatched at the bait. He was soon showing her the genealogical tree drawn by his own hand, and narrating anecdotes of various Lathebys. There was the story of Lady Joan's reception of Prince Charles who came in disguise to the Towers, and who ever after pursued with his advances the beautiful and Then there was the story virtuous hostess. of the Regent's friendship for Sir Montagu, and Sir Gregory's feats as a duellist and a The names of his ancestors rolled out of Mr. Latheby's mouth with a sonorousness that might have awoke the echoes of the Temple of Fame.

"You have had an opportunity of watching Miss Saville; what is the expression of her face?" Cecil whispered to Mary as they stood apart in the drawing-room.

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"She is very pretty—more than pretty," Mary said, admiringly. "Her movements are all so easy and graceful, and the *ensemble* so picturesque; but never could I describe to you the beauty and sparkle of her grey eyes!"

"Can you see any likeness to the winsome little girl of years ago?"

"I scarcely remember your little girl's features; but she has the same resolute way of holding herself, and looking you straight in the face as she talks. She has deep dimples, and her teeth so white that her smile is like a flash of light; there is something charming in her expression—something subtle and penetrating—a little bit mocking, but soft."

"Yes; I fancied there was something of the witch about her," he replied.

"But were you not overcome with amazement when Miss Saville entered the room on papa's arm, and turned out to be the mysterious guest we had been preparing for all day?"

"Yes; I was surprised," answered Cecil.

"I wonder," said Mary, "what it is that has made papa so suddenly veer round. Last week it was nothing short of an anathema to mention the Savilles' name in his presence; and here we are to-day entertaining Miss Saville as if she were a princess of the blood."

"Father held out a hope to me the other day that he would write to Mrs. Saville," answered Cecil, "to the effect which, you know, I have so long wished him to sanction. I did not expect this, however. It was kind of Miss Saville to come."

When Cecil listened again, Mr. Latheby and Clara were standing before Lady Grace's portrait. Mr. Latheby was expatiating on his grandmother's genius. She sang like an angel; and as for acting, she would have been a Siddons had she remained on the stage.

"It must be admitted that Clara's love of fun had by this time got the better of her. She was, as Cecil had divined, under an irresistible inclination to draw out her host not with any ill-natured view of retailing his oddities, but for her own private amusement—for Miss Saville had an intense relish of the comic.

"I have heard so much of the history you are writing," she now began, with affected interest in her voice, "that I am curious to know something of it; will you be so kind as to read a chapter of it for me to-night?"

"Oh! ah! the history of my ancestors." replied Mr. Latheby, with the proud humility of flattered authorship. "I could not think of inflicting my crude jottings upon you.

It is simply a record for my children! 'Lives of great men!' you know, Miss Saville."

"Crude jottings! that is a bait thrown out for a compliment. I ask, I beg you to read me a chapter," said Clara.

"For Miss Saville to ask is to command," said Mr Latheby, with a bow. "But indeed," he went on, with affected indifference, drawing his breath between each phrase, "the work can be interesting only to a Latheby. They were a remarkable race. I confess I am proud of belonging to them."

"And you, I am sure, are their worthy historian. Come, I know this fat volume, with that resplendent coat of arms your hand is resting on, is the first of the series. Please open it, Mr. Latheby, and read."

"Hem!—you have guessed it, Miss Saville.

I have had part of my manuscript bound,"

replied Mr. Latheby, twisting himself with infinite complacency. "If you wish, then, I will read for you the account—the short account—traditional, of course—(flourishing his eye-glass), of Sir Godfrey de Latheby, who went to the crusade with Prince Edward. Hem!—here—I have endeavoured to follow the simple style of old chroniclers as most suitable." Mr. Latheby put on his glasses, and squared himself in his chair.

- "Froissart?" suggested Clara.
- "He has been my model throughout, Miss Saville," answered Mr. Latheby, his face and form dilating as he prepared to read the story, written by himself, of the remote Sir Godfrey's valiant deeds. He smoothed the page and began.

But how do justice to the sledge-hammer enunciation, the pompous delivery of the introduction, the emphasis, and galvanized gesture that accompanied the heroic crisis—the sudden *pianissimo* of the melancholy close!

With great command of countenance Clara watched and listened. When Mr. Latheby passed from the laboured heroic to the pathetic, it was the point when the sense of absurdity became an agony, and she feared she would laugh out. At the close of the performance, she declared she felt as if she had assisted at the scenes described. She vowed the delivery helped the narrative—it brought out all the pageantry.

Mr. Latheby bowed, and accepted the praise with the utmost simplicity. He did not detect a note of ridicule in her voice. He was always as unconscious of a joke levelled against his family pride as a pyramid of Egypt would be to the fillip of some passing tourist. Entirely possessed by

his theme, he kept turning the pages of his manuscript.

Mary thanked Clara for her warm appreciation of the History. The pause that followed was broken by Cecil.

"You have experience, Miss Saville; you act well yourself," he said. The voice was not abrupt. To an inattentive ear the speech would have had no significance; but a bright blush flitted over Clara's cheek, and she was silent. No one else seemed to detect a reproof.

The talk went on, Mr. Latheby's voice doing it all. Clara watched her moment, and said in a lowered tone to Cecil, who was sitting near her: "You must not mind what I said. I am so pleased and happy at being here to-night." She seemed to wait for a reply, but none came; perhaps she was piqued that he passed unnoticed her conciliatory advance; for her cheeks flushed, and she spoke no more.

Mr. Latheby was the first again to break the silence. He did not see anything amiss. "Our fair guest might perhaps like a breath of fresh air," he said, pushing the volume aside, and advancing towards Clara. "The evening is beautiful; our garden is small, but the flowers are all out—roses and lilies—perfuming the air."

Clara was glad to get up and follow him out; as she passed Cecil she said, very distinctly:

"Thank you once more for the reading, Mr. Latheby; the Lady Grace would be proud of her descendant's powers of declamation."

"I am proud of Miss Saville's praise," he answered, with a profound bow.

Half-an-hour after, as Cecil was wandering about the garden alone, he heard the rustle of a dress, shy as the flutter of an approaching bird; then a voice said, softly:

- "This is such a pretty garden; it is so quaint and picturesque."
- "It has much beauty for us," replied Cecil.
- "Angry yet?" said the voice, in a tone of half-coaxing *badinage*. Cecil turned his blind eyes to her with a quiet smile:
  - "Angry; no; say disappointed."
  - "Then you expected something?"
  - "Yes," he answered, after a pause.
- "But you know nothing about me—that is—only ill, I might say."
- "You know, Miss Saville, I am blind," he said; "and when I first heard your voice, it was to me very much as if I saw your face. But that voice changed to-night, and I do not feel as if I knew you."

She did not answer for a moment. Then she said:

"How you know this queer old walk! Those lilies, those stocks and pinks, those heliotropes must talk to you in perfume, and those dear old red flower-pots with the mosses on them. Take care; you'll tumble over them," and she laid her hand lightly on his sleeve.

"I know every inch of this ground," he replied with a smile.

"So you were disappointed with me," said Clara. "If you knew me more, I am afraid disappointment would be a very mild word. But one thing I do not think I am capable of now, after the pact we made, you know. I would not wound your feelings. You will allow, I made your father quite happy—but I confess I did not notice you till you gave me that awful reproof. Then," she went on in a changed voice, "I grew quite sorry, and I followed you out. Was I then so very cruel?"

"You drew my father out effectively, Miss Saville. He has some hobbies and some weaknesses—perhaps the most appropriate term to use for the latter, to a stranger, would be some apparent absurdities."

"Weaknesses—don't say absurdities," said Clara gently, "although you may answer, it is owing to me that you have used the harsher term; but, indeed, I am sorry to think that I laughed at one whose weaknesses are perhaps altogether fostered by circumstances."

"You are right, Miss Saville," said Cecil, "circumstances have fostered them. His manœuvres to meet misfortune with cynicism are very transparent. His clinging to the skirts of the old family grandeur is piteous enough; but they help him to keep a brave front. Poverty is very sore to him, for he has all the liberal and hospitable instincts of his ancestors."

"I am sure of it," said Clara, earnestly.

"Now I begin to know you again," said Cecil, turning to her.

There was a pause,—a pause of forgiveness.

- "Were you surprised to see me to-night?" then asked Clara.
  - "Surprise is not the word," he answered.
  - "Were you pleased?"
- "It was very gracious and magnanimous of you to come, Miss Saville."
- "It was very daring," she replied; "for you know my mother is away; but, you see, your father and I have concluded a peace convention, and my being here this evening is a preliminary to our secret treaty."
- "I would hang illuminations in every window, and batter Fareham down with the sound of rejoicing for the signing of this treaty," he said heartily.
- "But it is a secret treaty, you know, as yet," said Clara.

As they talked, the fingers of twilight were busy subduing the sparkles of colour, and softening outlines. Out of the greyness the faces of the flowers shone like spirits watching the two walking in and out amongst them; on those young countenances, also, the soul seemed to come out more bright, as features and hue were veiled by the dimness.

"But you and I have known each other a long time; have we not?" resumed Clara, after another little pause.

"Yes. Once we met, years and years ago. Won't you sit down, Miss Saville?"

He had led her to a seat arched over with a trellis-work, overgrown with creepers. It stood on the highest part of the garden, overlooking the village, the stretching fields; the sea beyond. The world looked like a vast goblet, into which night was slowly pouring a liquid opiate of dark azure.

"How you knew when we came to the seat! Oh the sweet-briar and the honey-suckle! How the scent comes out in the evening," said Clara, sniffing the perfume.

"You will smile at me, Miss Saville; it was my fancy to have a seat placed here; and have the view set in a frame of flowers and leaves."

"So you remember our first meeting; it was in the field by the old deserted mill," said Clara.

"Yes, it was on a morning or two after our arrival here. Mary had left me, when a voice suddenly addressed me, and plied me with questions."

"I had watched you a long time over the hedge, before seating myself unceremoniously down by your side. Oh, dear! what can you have thought of me?"

"The voice was so consequential, so fresh and inquisitive. It spoke so grandly of asking me to luncheon, and of the field as its property; I was inclined to fancy it was that of a fay popped out of one of the cowslip bells, intent upon doing the hospitalities of the meadow; but I was not long kept in suspense. I was soon assured it was that of a little creature, mortal like myself, with a rose-bud mouth, streaks of gold through her hair, possessing very bright eyes and three big dimples."

- "You remember all that nonsense," said Clara, flushing and laughing. "What an imp I must have been. Well, suppose I paint my portrait for you, now?"
- "Pray do," answered Cecil, beguiled into complete forgetfulness of all but the present.
- "Well," said Clara, slowly, "now as then—my nose is decidedly not my strong point. I cannot flatter myself, that, even looked at full face, it is a satisfactory nose, and I dare not consider the profile. As for my mouth,

there was never anything less like a rosebud, but then my teeth make up for deficiencies; they are as white and even as they can be; a nigger might be proud of them."

"But the dimples! I hope they are not gone?" said Cecil, with an amused smile.

"Not gone, but somewhat waned! They are more like the footprints of laughter than hollows bored by it. The one just under the left eye is only the suggestion of one."

"I hope the little streaks of gold through the hair are there still."

"Extinguished, utterly. Not a tangible gold hair to be found through the whole mane, which is the colour of a wholesome chestnut. When I shake it down it goes to my heels, then I look uncanny."

"But what about the eyes? The eyes that looked so bright under the long dark lashes?"

"Oh! the eyes are my strong point," said vol. II. 26

Clara, merrily. "They are the bit of property I am thoroughly satisfied with. I do not say they are fine eyes. They are not large, and I am afraid they have a greenish tinge. My enemies might call them gooseberries; my friends call them stars. I can answer for them that they see like the best pair of spectacles ever made."

"You are a true artist, Miss Saville; you have painted a very charming picture, with the most subtle delicacy, and with the art to conceal art. I have had another portrait of you painted for me this evening, and by the help of the two I can now carry about me a most delightful vision."

"As pleasant as that of the little girl of long ago?"

"As pleasant, but as different in degree as the wide-awake rose is to the little blinking cowslip." The slightest pause, during which a question trembled on Clara's lips. It soon came. "Do you remember how distinctly you said then, you and I could never be friends?"

- "I remember," he answered, with an imperceptible movement, like the recoil of an animal into its shell.
  - "But we are friends," she said.
  - "We are!" he answered.
- "That is not very heartily said," she replied, turning with vexation on her lips. She could not read the expression of his face, but she could almost fancy it had paled a little. Again, the contrasts upon it struck her with their pathos. Its singular but manly beauty, and the blight upon it. Its look of young power and of checked activity. The glow of inward energy, that seemed to illuminate the skin itself, and the sudden blank under the brows. As she looked, her eyes grew a little dim.

"Why cannot we be friends?" she asked, like a child. "Is it on account of the past feud about the Towers?"

"We are friends — only, Miss Saville, you are rich and I am poor, and between wealth and poverty there is a gulf (putting up his hands) like that of death. All the conditions of existence are altered on either side of it."

"But this is pride—another kind of pride," said Clara. "Have we not common interests? Must I always carry about with me the jingle of my money-bags?"

"I am afraid the jingle of money-bags is the most obtrusive jingle in the world, Miss Saville," said Cecil, with a melancholy playfulness.

"You exaggerate the *rôle* of money," said Clara, with her usual directness of tone. "You live in a country town where money is the only tangible power the good folk understand. But if you travelled (she was going to say, if you saw the picture galleries, but with a quick glance at his sightless eyes she checked herself), if you witnessed the effect of music, the thread of sound of Joachim's violin, holding breathless a crowded hall, you would know that there is but one real power in the world, and that is genius. In the face of the 'Tannhäuser' and 'Fidelio,' the jingle of money-bags would affect you about as much as the sound of a baby's rattle."

Then, without waiting for his answer, she branched off into an account of some of the things that had interested her in her travels. She was very entertaining, sometimes somewhat cynical, even occasionally a little profane, but she was always original. She was very audacious. Cecil sometimes caught himself laughing against his sense of decorum, of right even, but before he could formulate

a censure even to his own mind, she was brightly describing some effect in nature she had noticed; an expression on a face that had struck her in a church or a railway carriage; or with simple pathos she was relating an incident in humble life; and her observations revealed genuineness of nature. Cecil was interested, even puzzled. reserve into which he had retired wore off. Her talk was so frank, so unconventional, sometimes even so reckless, that it opened up a vein of comradeship between them. Presently he became aware that the tide had turned. It was he who was talking; she who was listening. Miss Saville was intensely the woman now. She was asking him questions in a gentle tone, soothing and caressing, and he was answering. He was talking his heart out to her. He was telling her of that walled-up desolateness of blindness, of his yearning to travel. He was discoursing on

music, confiding his large ambition to her, pouring into her ear the famishing of his eyes for light, and she was listening with rapt attention, encouraging him to speak by words few but subtle and penetrating, and the world seemed to be growing less chill and large to him for her sympathy in it.

They talked a long time, until the purple opiate filled the goblet below, and star after star stole out of infinity. To Cecil those moments went past like a purling stream on whose ripples the sunlight is lying.

During the interview he had so admirably brought about, how describe Mr. Latheby's dramatics! How he hummed, and cut the new periodical, how he smoked his best cigar, and kept his eye on the bench on which the couple were sitting. What benizens he heaped upon them! He intercepted Mary on her way to them, and carried her off to the kitchen-garden, and discoursed on

the vegetables, the beet-root, and the peas. His huge content with his day's work brimmed over in look and gestures. He interrupted an observation on the asparagus to pass a eulogium on Clara. He was even benevolent towards Mrs. Saville for having trained a nature so rich and enthusiastic, and yet left it so fresh and graceful. It spoke volumes for her. He nearly made Mary his confidante that now it was no longer a wrong between him and Mrs. Saville, but a hope between Cecil and Clara. He restrained himself; he remembered he had to deal with young people. It was soft, young hearts that were to be moulded. True, he had now only to deal, as it were, with a magnet and a needle; he had brought them together, and the result was taken out of his hands. But it was still his part to watch that no adverse current should interrupt the conditions of attraction.

It was only when Elizabeth came to announce supper that the talk between Clara and Cecil came to an end.

"Now can't we be friends?" she asked, as they parted. He held her hand a minute.

"I have been dreaming that we might," he said gravely and quickly. There was a feeling in his tone and an unaffected sincerity to which there was no answer.

As Miss Saville walked home with Mr. Latheby in the dark she renewed her promise to him to be his advocate with her mother when his letter arrived. They parted in mystery and in silence at the Towers' lodge; then Clara sped swiftly to the house, and up to her room.

## CHAPTER VI.

"Ever note, Lucilius,
When love begins to sicken and decay,
It useth an enforced ceremony.
There are no tricks in plain and simple faith."

Julius Casar.

THE day after Mrs. Saville's return, a large square envelope lay on the breakfast-table, which Clara recognized at a glance. When her mother took it up, she went on pouring out the coffee with extra care, and studied unconcern.

"Eh? What's this?" said Mrs. Saville, her hand trembling a little as she held up the imposing missive. "What's—this—crest? A helmet with vizor and lance—and this motto; come here, Fred, your eyes are younger than mine."

"Toujours vaillant. The Latheby crest and

motto, and no mistake," said Fred, with energy. "I say, Clara, the Old Pretender's pride is coming down. He has sent a letter.'

"Perhaps it's a challenge to you to single, mortal combat," said Clara, with the faintest deepening of colour, as her mother broke the seal.

"You had better read it, Fred," Mrs. Saville said, trying to preserve an appearance of indifference. "I cannot make it out. What a hand the man writes!"

Fred read, with emphasis, the letter Clara knew.

"So the music-master gives up his heir-ship to what he had no right to," said Mrs. Saville, with a tremulous, disagreeable laugh. "Very noble and chivalrous of him!"

"The enemy surrenders unconditionally. Is it a dodge, or is it a ruse de guerre? How shall we treat his advances?" said Fred, looking to Clara for his cue.

"Let me read and judge," she answered, extending her hand for the letter. "Let me ponder the terms of the offer of capitulation."

"Ponder, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Saville, firing up. "Perhaps I had better go down on my knees, and say, 'Thank you, my lord, for your generosity to a poor widow!"

"My Lord Latheby," said Clara, studying the letter, and making a pretence of impartiality, "evidently believes that he has been besieging the Towers for months and years, with an army at his back, and that heroism has at last succumbed to the force of circumstances. That 'striking of the flag' is a superb touch. Yet I think there is a tone of earnestness through the bombast."

- "Yes," said Fred.
- "Rubbish!" said Mrs. Saville.
- "There is a certain reluctance, also, that sounds like truthfulness," Clara went on,

with undaunted impartiality. "He does not conceal that he is very loth to give up. After all, his son may have deserted, and gone over to our side. We might give him the benefit of the doubt."

- "We might," acquiesced her cousin.
- "Your opinion is worthless, Fred. You follow Clara like the veriest lamb, the bell-wether. What has happened that you should so suddenly change your creed?" Mrs. Saville went on, looking sharply at her daughter. "You were not inclined for reconciliation a little while ago."

"Reconciliation is a strong word," replied Clara, with ingenious duplicity, a blush rising to her cheek; "but the case is altered now. The Lathebys declare themselves beaten, and are making advances. I simply think they should be considered. It is only fair. I have heard that the son went against his father in the late lawsuit. I

own I did not believe it. This seems a proof of it."

"Proof! when all his chances are over.

A better proof would have been had he spoken in time. I don't believe in those eleventh-hour repentances. I always suspect their motives."

"We do not know, aunt, how he might have acted had his father won his suit. Give him the benefit of the doubt," suggested Fred, with some hesitation. He was puzzled at his cousin's partizanship, but he stuck to her colours manfully.

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Saville. "I only see impertinence in the offer."

"Impertinence or not, think, mamma, of the beau rôle you would play," said Clara, adroitly changing her tactics. "Think of the triumph of accepting Mr. Latheby's submission in the ancestral home. I can see you sitting in the biggest, most imposing arm-chair in

the ball-room. I shall turn up your hair over a cushion. You shall have on one of the lace fichus you used to wear — I know where Briggs keeps them—and the crimson satin made in Paris. You shall look like Marie Antoinette to the life; receiving the homage of some conquered old enemy."

"Don't be foolish, child," said Mrs. Saville, repressing a pinched smile.

"I see," Clara went on, pursuing her advantage, "Mr. Latheby's Chesterfieldian airs and graces, as he makes his way up the big, shining room, accompanied by his reflection in the mirrors on either side. What a triumph for you, before Fareham! What a clatter and excitement there will be! I wonder Mr. Latheby can consent to eat humble pie in the face of it all."

"He ought to be made to eat humble pie," said Mrs. Saville.

"It would certainly be a triumph," said Fred, gazing admiringly on Clara.

"After that act of submission, the supremacy of the Savilles will be established in Fareham for ever," Clara went on, with merry pompousness. "Who can say nay to it, when the descendant of all the Lathebys has himself accepted it? There shall not be two camps any more, nor two opinions, nor two allegiances. The good people will cease to discuss the merits of our claim, and will give up peeping over their Prayerbooks at Church to watch our behaviour to the Lathebys in the opposite pew."

"That side of the argument touches me very little," interrupted Mrs. Saville, curtly.

"No; the main point is the public submission of Mr. Latheby," said Fred, following up Clara's happier argument.

"It is worth having had the lawsuit to

have the triumph of it," said Clara, darting a bright glance at him.

Mrs. Saville resisted for some time the idea of receiving Mr. Latheby. She was induced, however, ultimately to accept it, by the argument of Clara—Fred humbly following suit—who continued vividly painting to her the triumph of the situation to herself. Then Clara was commissioned to write a short note to Mr. Latheby, expressing Mrs. Saville's willingness to receive him some afternoon at the Towers.

That note Mr. Latheby read out to Cecil and Mary. Ever since the evening Miss Saville had spent at the Dower House, Mr. Latheby had been loud in her praises. Such grace, such piquancy, such manners of the world; and then so pretty, so dainty. Mary also piped her honest little note of admiration of their guest, but Cecil was reticent.

"Come, Cecil," Mr. Latheby had said vol. II. 27

at breakfast the morning after Clara's visit, "You and Miss Saville had a long chat; what do you think of her?"

"What do I think of her?" repeated Cecil, and then he stopped.

"Yes," said Mary; "tell us how you like her."

"I wish I could see her when she speaks," said Cecil.

"We'll lend you our eyes;—the most charming face, the most enchanting dress, the sweetest smile—and, you can judge for yourself, the most unmistakeable intelligence," Mr. Latheby said in a voice of volume.

"I heard her dress rustle, I heard her step on the gravel, and I felt her hand. The dress was silk, the step was gentle, and the hand was kind," said Cecil, with a smile, and he said no more.

"You are hiding your true opinion of

Miss Saville," Mary said to him, when they were alone.

- "Why she is little more than a voice to me," he answered; then he went on with hesitation, "and I don't know if the voice is quite sincere."
  - "She looks honest," said Mary.
- "I know so few women," replied Cecil, patting her hand. "I cannot judge what she is like. I know what she is not like; she is not like you, pet."

It was noticeable how indulgent Mr. Latheby's tone had become towards Mrs. Saville. When her daughter's note arrived, it was an opportunity to launch into praise of the young lady, and magnanimous toleration of the elder one.

"I think," he went on, addressing Cecil, when the panegyric was over, "you and Polly had better go up to the Towers tomorrow. I have not been feeling very well. I have had a twinge of my old enemy the gout."

Cecil shook his head; he had too many engagements, and courtesy required the visit to be paid by the head of the house.

Mary knew from his tone and manner that Cecil would not swerve from the point. He was easily led in trifles, but when he formed a resolve, she had never known him to turn from it to the right or left; she knew, or rather felt, the central point of her brother's nature was pride—not like his father's pride, but pride all sensitive, and nowise hard—the pride of youth that endures the severest forfeits, encounters the greatest perils, and embraces even death itself. She knew that underlying his manly fortitude was a nature keenly emotional, and she vaguely foreboded that his was just that order of heart that cannot stand the siege of love when once the outwork pride has fallen.

When Mr. Latheby perceived it was hopeless to expect Cecil to call at the Towers, he prepared himself with a feeling of squeamishness to go there with Mary. Accordingly, the next afternoon, accompanied by his daughter, he went forth in a state of heroic nausea; but when the old home came in view, the sight of its antique stateliness inspired an humble fortitude.

They were shown into the grand drawingroom. Here again the cold tremor he had experienced the other day overcame him; again
it was brought keenly home to him that he
was an alien here; that strangers owned this
sanctuary of the Lathebys. In the place of
honour hung the portrait of Mr. Saville, the
founder of the family of the present occupiers;
a marble bust of him stood by the grand
carved old mantel-piece. The late brewer
presented a brisk business-like appearance.
Alertness, shrewdness, success, were stamped

upon his brows, kindled the expression of his eye, straightened his pose. On either side of him his wife and children looked down from the walls, a comely group. On the frames were the Saville crest and motto. sombre grandeur of Vandyck's portraits of Sir Basil and Lady Clementina; Sir Joshua Reynolds' and Gainsborough's portraits of the later Lathebys had been jostled into the second place. The old coat of arms, with its associations of centuries, lay perdu Mr. Latheby sat down hurin shadow. riedly — in silence. He sought to brace himself by recalling the motive that had led him to expose himself to this self-torture.

Mary was standing with brightened eyes before Sir Basil's portrait, when Clara entered brilliant and gay.

"Mamma will be glad to see you," she said, shaking hands. "I am sorry to say she is not so well to-day. She is too much of

an invalid to come to you here; you must go to her."

"We shall be honoured to wait upon her wherever she may please to receive us," said Mr. Latheby, making a brave bow.

"Well, and what do you think of your ancestor's portrait?" inquired Clara of Mary.

"I see such a likeness to Cecil in it. I do not know if others see it; but if only Cecil had consciousness in his eyes, I think he would be Sir Basil, stepped out of this frame."

"It is an extraordinary likeness," said Mr. Latheby, plucking up his spirits, "and yet not so extraordinary when we remember that in the descendants, the ancestors live again."

"Likeness!" said Clara, mischievously.

"Let me see where it is. Yes; I think I see it, in the left wing of the nose, and in-

that curl over the forehead." She blushed as she spoke, for she knew she had often thought of the likeness herself.

Then she led the way, and ushered them into her mother's morning-room.

Mr. Latheby remembered Mrs. Saville as she was the first year of his arrival in Fareham. He remembered her—tall, haughty and stately, strongly resembling the portraits of Marie Antoinette, and dressing in the style of that beautiful queen. Now he saw lying on the sofa, covered with shawls, a thin woman, whose complexion had the wan, flaccid appearance in-door life gives.

Fareham had decided by this time that nothing really ailed Mrs. Saville; that she was only nervous and fanciful. Lying there, with rayless eyes, she looked the sad embodiment of hypochondria. At the entrance of her late antagonists, a frosty dignity rose to Mrs. Saville's face; she sat up to receive

them. Clara introduced them, and a passage of bows and courtesies ensued. Mrs. Saville said that she was pleased to receive Mr. and Miss Latheby. Mr. Latheby, in appropriate terms, vowed the honour was theirs.

Then there followed some cautious and tentative approaches. Mrs. Saville and Mr. Latheby were like two manœuvring generals in the duel of courtesy.

Mr. Latheby felt the indelicacy of lauding the trees and conservatories, and shrank from inquiring what changes had been made in the place. He feared to turn his eyes towards the pictures, lest their expression should grow reproachful. Mrs. Saville did not like to inquire of the humble home, but felt a need of a certain proprietary ease and loftiness of manner, as though her people had always owned the Towers.

"It is a happy event for the tenants," said Mr. Latheby; he did not say your

tenants; "your settling down in the place, after your travels! Quite an auspicious event for Fareham."

"I am fortunate in having a good steward," said Mrs. Saville; "the value of the property has almost doubled during my absence."

Mr. Latheby hemmed, and suppressed his sentiments; then turned abruptly to the question of her sufferings. He at last found himself on easy ground. She graciously discussed with him her theory of diet and rules of health; the necessity of ventilation, and the effects of various climates upon her constitution. It was a sad thing Paris did not agree with her.

Mr. Latheby seized the chance; it was an opportunity to say something graceful. He observed, that anyhow Paris must have agreed with her lovely daughter.

"Every place agrees with Clara equally," replied Mrs. Saville, curtly.

"Yes; I am always in an uninteresting state of health," said Clara; who, while entertaining Mary, was keeping an eye and ear at the service of her mother and her guest. "I never let my cousin prescribe for me, that is the reason."

"My nephew is the only physician who understands my case, and who gives me relief," said Mrs. Saville, in a tone that was a rebuke to Clara for her speech, and to Mr. Latheby for smiling at it.

"We must all feel very grateful to him then," said Mr. Latheby, with empressement.

"He is not only my doctor; he is my right hand," replied Mrs. Saville, coldly. "I just now said I had an excellent steward; but my nephew does what no steward can do. He endears me and my family to my tenants, by showing them that he has their interests, as much as mine, at heart."

"Excellent! Excellent indeed!" said Mr. Latheby, wincing.

"He has taken up the labourers; their condition particularly interests him. They were most pitifully neglected. When I bought the property, I had so much to do in the way of drainage and plantation. I spent so much money to bring it up to anything like its proper value, that no doubt the poor of the place were quite as little looked after."

"Just so!" murmured Mr. Latheby, on the rack of humiliation; then with something like a flash—"Yet, Mrs. Saville, that neglect was only during Sir Peter's life-time; if you read the old Chronicles of my family, you would see that no poor in all England fared so well, or were better cared for than ours."

"I do not read Chronicles. They are not the literature I care for," replied Mrs. Saville, with apparent indifference, yet resenting this allusion to a past which she coveted as much as he coveted the present. The drop of vulgarity in her blood came uppermost. "What has been, does not interest me. You know, Mr. Latheby, the Saville motto, chosen by my father, 'Il Futuro.'"

- "Perhaps ours ought to be 'The Past,'" said Mr. Latheby, with a ghastly smile.
- "When I choose a motto," put in Clara, coming to the rescue, "it shall be the 'Present.' The Past has been, that at any rate is an advantage, but the Present is; as for the Future, it is nowhere."
- "Quite right! Miss Saville," said Mr. Latheby, with something like enjoyment.
- "The future is everything!" replied Mrs. Saville, with curt severity. Then with infinite patronage she turned to Mr. Latheby: "Would you like to see the house, Mr. Latheby? I understand you have not been

over it. It must be interesting to you. My daughter will show you over it."

This was too much for Mr. Latheby's feelings; the dormant envy stirred in his blood. He was not equal to the ordeal of being shown over his own house by the usurper.

"No," he said, rising; "I would not think of fatiguing Miss Saville; besides, we have country habits; we dine early. We must be going."

"I shall accompany you to the park-gate," said Clara.

Then Mr. Latheby bowed, and touched the tips of Mrs. Saville's fingers, as if they were partners in a minuet.

"I hope we have not over-tired Mrs. Saville; it was very good of her to receive us when she is such an invalid," said Mr. Latheby, with an affectation of ease, as they descended the granite steps in front of the house.

"Ah! but I saw another welcome besides hers," said Clara, with a side-long glance, mischievous, yet kind. "I saw the ghosts bowing in full-bottomed wigs, and laced waistcoats, and oh! such a rustle of silks and clanking of spurs! I do believe you were afraid of meeting Lady Clementina in the long corridor."

This speech delighted Mr. Latheby. It soothed his jarred feelings, and revived the feeling of kinship with the ghosts that lurked everywhere, in every corner. For five minutes, as he walked the distance between the house and the park-gates, he felt himself Lord of the place, and in his heart despised the sick lady inside.

"Mrs. Saville believes in her doctor implicitly; in your cousin, I mean. You do not, I think, share this confidence, Miss Saville?" he asked suddenly as they neared the gate.

"Confidence? in good Doctor Factotum!—seneschal, librarian, gardener, physician—a whole suite in himself; and, when we are parted, our circulating library besides, for I have to read to mamma his daily letters over and over again. Well, perhaps, if I saw and heard a little less of him I might be a fairer judge."

Mr. Latheby expanded with lively satisfaction on hearing this description of Fred.

As he and Mary walked up the dusty road, he suddenly burst out after a silence: "There's no truth in the report. She will never marry him."

- "Who will never marry whom?" asked Mary, with slow-voiced wonder.
- "Miss Saville will never marry her cousin."
- "Why, papa; why should you care if she did?"
  - "Mary," said Mr. Latheby severely,

stopping and pointing with his stick to the Towers. "The vulgar woman who owns the old house may sneer as much as she likes, and make me understand that the Lathebys are of the Past. But her greasy money can never buy the memories of our ancient place. There's not a stone of it but will take care of that. What becomes of the Towers when the heiress marries must be of interest to us. I have a feeling the Towers will be ours again some day, whether we find the registry or not."

"I never felt before, so much, that they had once been ours as to-day, when I looked at Sir Basil's portrait, so like Cecil, hanging up there," said Mary, simply.

Before the unscheming innocence of her eyes Mr. Latheby could say no more, and they continued their road in silence.

"I think," said Clara to her mother, with some asperity in her tone, "the 'Young vol. II. 28 Pretender' might have accompanied his father in paying this visit of submission."

"I am sure I did not want the son. I had quite enough of the father," answered Mrs. Saville curtly.

## CHAPTER VII.

"'Tis the old abbey library: he's there,
There in his earnest, ardent youth: no fiend
Haunts that immeasurable mine of wealth,
But hope and rapture, flowing from old tomes,
Quicken the life in life."—An Hour Ago.

Some days after, Mrs. Saville went in state with her daughter to the Dower House, to return Mr. Latheby's call. The visit was regally short, icily formal. On her return she said she had enough of it. She had now done her duty; she would do no more. Clara had to give up the hope that the exchange of courtesies, she had so subtly helped to bring about, would lead to friendly relations between the two houses. The intercourse between them she felt must always be superficial. Nor could she disguise from herself the fact that Cecil did not seek her

out. He had not called at the Towers. When they accidentally met, for all the gentle courtesy of his address, there was a reserve about him she could not understand. Yet sometimes, she thought, his face brightened at her approach. His demeanour piqued and puzzled her; she felt sure that he was wilfully resisting the pledge of friendship he had given.

With difficulties and obstacles on every side, the longing only grew to know him, to understand him — perhaps to control and conquer him. Since she had met him, a romance was in her life. The picciola blossom that had sprung up, had grown and expanded, and she no longer sought to root it out, but nourished it, as a darling idleness. She could count on her fingers her meetings with Cecil. One of them had been in childhood; another in anger; and yet what was he to her? One she had wronged, insulted,

and saved from peril, the descendant of the Lathebys; perhaps the rightful heir of the Towers. Beautiful, intellectual, dependant; and so she spun and spun, she knew not what maiden fancies.

Cecil practised on the organ; and two days in the week was always to be found in the organ-loft of Fareham Church.

Miss Saville now began to take great interest in the choir. Jimmy's father, Simeon Hillier, kept the key of the organloft. He was a shy and nervous individual, and reigned over the choir as organist. Clara did not examine her motives. "Nothing could be more natural," she said to herself, "than that the daughter of the Lady of the Manor should, for her own sake and comfort, become patroness of an institution that was a fruitful source of distress and impiety to Christians with cultivated ears." She got her mother to ask the

Rector to dinner, and received his grateful sanction to her scheme. "Mr. Latheby," he said, "at one time, occupied himself with the choir, but his time was so much engaged now that he had to give it up.

Miss Saville had plenty of time on her hands. Her mother's nervous disorder precluded the possibility of entertaining at the Towers. Fred fulfilled many offices that by right should have been hers to fill. Her gipsy love of fresh air and exercise had contributed to emancipate her from in-door occupations.

She set about her task at once with her usual energy; and amused her mother at dinner, and enchanted Fred, with the vivid account she gave of her labours. What a plantation she had undertaken to till! "It was like a tangle of thistles," she said—"an overgrown garden."

Simeon Hillier was filled with enthusiasm

at the rapidity with which she began to weed. With his shrunken legs and longpointed nose, he looked like an astonished heron as he watched her.

On the very first day, she dismissed a dreadful little lad in a chronic state of influenza, who was supposed to be treble, and Widow Hopkins, who made up for absence of ear by power of lung. Against these two, Simeon was wont to mutter in an infirm bass; but since he could no longer look to Mr. Latheby for help, he had not dared to take more efficient measures to procure their silence. He had long since given up seeking to train into working together harmoniously the forces nature had put at his disposal in the choir. "A sturdy assertion of the right of each individual to his own discord marks every minstrel in it," said Clara, "and I am going to repress that right." Outside, public opinion was against an over-care for

singing. There was a vague, yet not the less persistent, notion amongst the farmers, that it was ungodly, that it flavoured of popery to ascribe to the Lord a partiality for a hymn being sung in or out of tune. Simeon had ceased to contend, and he allowed the hymns to become the declaration of a creed whose virtue lay in its zeal and in its hearty disregard of harmony.

He was a little man; simple and chatty out of the organ-loft, but nervous and quivering as a hare when his fingers lay on the notes. A secret motive braced him up to endure the discord that awaited him every Sunday, and over which he presided with the impassibility of a mummy. He was the son of a hard-worked carpenter, who had no ear for music, and who disdained an occupation that left no tangible sign when toil at it was over; but his mother's brother Robin had been the best fiddler in all the

country-side. For miles around, not a christening, or a wedding, or a ball, on New Year's or Christmas eve, but was considered shorn of its best feature if ungraced by Robin's fiddle. And Robin, before Simeon was four years of age, had detected music in his nephew's small soul. He had taught him to draw the bow, and, guided by a very accurate ear, the mannikin had profited with amazing rapidity by his lessons.

The country people thought it was a miracle to see the little lad perched up on a chair, and playing "as pretty as a musical-box." Even the carpenter smiled with paternal pride at the exhibition. When Simeon was fifteen Robin died, and left him his violin. Perhaps Simeon would have cared for no more brilliant destiny than to spend his years roaming and fiddling from house to house; welcome at the squire's parlour and the farmer's kitchen; but fortune

had already opened another career for him. The organist of Fareham church had taken a fancy to the lad, who occasionally blew the bellows, and who, one day, in his rapture at hearing the "Hallelujah" chorus rendered on the organ, forgot his occupation, and plunged the church into sudden silence. The result of this fit of abstraction was, that Simeon had been dismissed from his post at the bellows, but taught the organ. organist was an accomplished musician well versed in counterpoint, but he was getting old and sleepy. He did not care to give to the congregation more than the limited round of voluntaries and hymn-tunes, which satisfied it. His pupil mastered these, and was allowed frequently to take his place, and rule over the choir. These were the hours of trial; but Simeon had happy hours in the organ-loft practising what antiphons and anthems he could find in his master's collection. Next to his violin this vast instrument was dear to him, with its tone like an archangel's in prayer. The organ was a thing of life to Simeon, and it filled him with awe. He would have thought it profanation to let his fingers improvise upon its keys as he improvised upon the chords of his violin, happy and unconscious, as a bird improvising melodies up in the green-wood tree.

Simeon longed to hear the archangel's voice in his organ breathing out other harmonies; accident made him the possessor of a sainted treasure. The library attached to the church was in an octagon-room up in its tower, and was reached by a winding staircase. It was rare now, that any feet went up and down the old well-worn stone steps. Simeon was entrusted with the care of dusting and showing the chained-up volumes to chance visitors. He did not care a penstroke for the prayerful beauty of the writing,

but one day he came across a collection of ancient church music. There were Latin hymns of the tenth century—cries of an anguish-stricken world under the shadow of approaching dissolution. There were masses and motets, dedicated to popes, written to the glory of the Almighty and His worship in the congregation, by Josquin Deprès, Palestrina, and their disciples; there were madrigali spirituali dedicated to the Virgin.

The young man's eyes eagerly scanned page after page of notes undivided by bars, apparently timeless. He followed their lead with difficulty, humming slowly to himself; but after a while a fire kindled his heart. The small room seemed to vibrate with faroff echoes of grand and simple strains, that expressed all man's needs, and were the triumphant assurance of God's power and compassion. Simeon would not carry those volumes to the organ-loft. He became like a

miser, secretive over his treasure. He worked weeks, months, years, copying, arranging transcribing for the organ those precious themes. When his master died, he was appointed organist of the church, at a low salary, and ruled the choir. He was not querulous over the discord there; he played the hymns imperturbably, but when the church was emptied came his revel. Then through the aisles and the arches poured the strains that had peopled them centuries ago.

One Sunday, as the farmers were shuffling out, and the choir were putting away their hymn-books with energy and bustle, an impulse seized Simeon to play an 'Introit' of Palestrina, and watch the effect upon the departing crowd.

He might have played to the deaf; not one listened. From that Sunday, an unsuspecting Protestant congregation was played in and out with Aves, Madrigals to the Virgin, and Latin monkish hymns. Had the simple soul presiding at the organ been capable of irony, some might have been suspected in this choice of Voluntaries. But a bear might have made an epigram sooner than Simeon.

He played unmolested and unlistened to, until Cecil came to Fareham. To hear those Voluntaries played on an organ, whose voice was like the prayer of past generations lifted into the calm harmony of spiritual worship, Cecil went to church. Later, he became Hillier's pupil.

With feminine tact, Clara now proceeded to gain the good-will of the garrulous old organist. She understood the organ, having had some lessons on it in Italy. She examined the one in Fareham Church, and made Simeon play for her, and praised his music. Her crowning achievement—that by which she completely won his heart—was

by praising the way in which his son blew the bellows. Hillier's shrivelled frame dilated with pride. He wagged his snipy head with the sagacity of a seer, and put up his lank fore-finger—" Yes, Miss, yes. He's got it in him—he's got the music in him. He's a bit soft, perhaps, about recognizing tunes; but the way he loves that bellows is a sign of it; he'll break out into tune some day, I always say."

There was no subject on which Simeon would gabble so cheerily as on that of his son. Jimmy, when set to work with the bellows, had neither eyes nor ears. With him it was mere athletics, not love of music, as Simeon would have it. The old man and the slouching lad together looked like gnomes whose work was other than that of mortals around them.

Simeon's marriage and its tragic end made him an object of interest to his neighbours, far more than did his musical gifts. For he had married in middle life, or rather, been married by a woman who was a drunkard. Soon after his marriage, the musician's tidy home became the scene of squalor. Simeon began taking a drop also, partly for company's sake, partly for cheer in his misery. Immediately after the birth of Jimmy, Fareham had been thrown into a state of excitement; for Mrs. Hillier, in an access of fever, had risen from her bed, dashed out of her house, and, almost within sight of her pursuers, had drowned herself in the "Dead Man's Pool."

On the Sunday following Clara's installation as leader of the choir, she rendered Simeon a service, by which she appeared to him in the light of a gracious Lady Bountiful. He sometimes still gave way to the weakness which he had contracted during his married life. It was not often very perceptible. It had never incapacitated him from his work;

but Fate would have it, that on the day before there had been a marriage feast, and Simeon had offered too many libations in honour of the married couple. This morning, a little feeble re-iteration of the notes, and a certain perfume of alcohol, made it very obvious that poor Simeon was inadequate to his duties. He was in a maudlin way conscious of this, when a hand touched his shoulder.

- "Let me take your place; I have a mind to play this morning," said Miss Saville, kindly.
- "Bless you, Miss, but you don't know this tune."
- "Never mind; we'll have the *Miserere*," said Clara. A certain arrangement of the *Miserere* was the only piece for the organ in which Clara could feel security.
  - "But the hymns," hiccupped poor Simeon.
  - "Never mind the hymns; anything will vol. II. 29

do to play the hymns to!" said Clara, who knew she could manage the simple tunes. "Now go home to bed."

A minute after, she had slipped into Hillier's place, and began to play. She knew that Cecil was in church. She was irritated against him. It was uncourteous, it was undignified even, not to have It was unkind, called at the Towers. after what had passed between them. had vowed to herself that she would not seek to overcome his prejudices; and yet now, the knowledge that he was listening had a stimulating influence on her perform-She played but for one listener, and she rendered the Miserere with fair effect certainly with feeling. As she rose to return to her place, glancing down, she saw Cecil's sightless eyes raised towards the organ-loft. Her own gleamed. Through the service she struggled well with the hymn-tunes; but

when the time came to play the people out, her musical resources being at an end, she played the *Miserere* again — with a little confidential smile, saying to herself—"I've spoilt my effect. He will see he has come to an end of me already."

The next afternoon Clara had appointed to give a lesson to the choir. Simeon was waiting for her at the churchyard-gate, tremulous with gratitude and confusion. His obeisances were more plentiful than his words.

Clara, with a smile pleasant as a cordial, comforted the timid soul. She needed no explanation; she had enjoyed playing the organ. Then, as Simeon walked more erect by her side, under the elm trees leading to the church-porch; "I hear that Mr. Latheby plays the organ—that he was your pupil, Mr. Hillier," she said. "I am sure that he would have played for you."

"I'd not have ventured to ask him, Miss," said Simeon, shaking his head and talking meditatively. "He's shy and dark is Mr. Latheby. He's as dark a young gentleman as ever I knew—not dark because he's blind, but shy and dark." Here the organist shook his head, with what might be taken for an explanatory wag.

"Do you mean that he's proud?" asked Clara.

"Well, Miss, I'll venture to say that he is proud. If you'll excuse me making so bold I'd say Mr. Latheby's music's like the nobility that keeps out of sight. Mine is for the poor public," replied Hillier, with uplifted forefinger, and a timorous laugh at his own joke.

"Perhaps it is because he feels the superiority of your playing, Mr. Hillier, that he keeps out of sight, or rather out of hearing," said Clara.

"No, Miss; you'd not say that if you heard him. Bless you, Miss, I make the organ lisp, but he makes it talk. He's proud. I'm not finding fault with the young gentleman for it," Simeon hastened to add. "I always say he has reasons to be proud, sitting here in church, with the monuments all round, and the words on them; the name Latheby graven all about on them. If a man's got an excuse for feeling proud in church, that man's Mr. Latheby, I always say. Then, what with the thought that he's poor—for, Lord, it's the village talk how hard up the family is—there's that about him makes me feel so scared. Sometimes, I know, I talk too much when I'm with him, because I'm flurried; and yet there's something I want to say I can't say. You see, Miss, I play for him—a new partition—and he listens, till he catches it up and plays it himself. That's what he calls having lessons; and he gives me more money than I'd think of asking, let alone that I'd teach him for nothing, for pride of it. But it's he settled the price; and I'd as soon think of standing up and contradicting the Rector in the pulpit as saying no to young Mr. Latheby."

- "Oh, but do you like him?" asked Clara.
- "Like him! I love him!" said Simeon, with a burst of vehemence.
  - "What do you love him for?"

"The lad's got a heart!" cried Simeon, forgetting to be respectful. "There's my boy, Miss, you so kindly took notice of. Mr. Latheby never forgets him. He always has a cheery word for him; and during the season, knowing the chap's partial to them, he always brings him apples or a handful of hazel-nuts, and he gives him new sixpences. Jim's got an eye for what's bright, has my lad. And, Miss, the boy clings to the young gentleman like the bit of lichen to the

stone. The neighbours say he's soft, and so he is, Miss. So he is; but they're two things I'd back up my chap for. He knows a good man from a bad one; and some folk, who think they've eyes stuck all over them, can't tell that. And he's got music in him. They don't see it, but I see it. The way he blows the bellows—a sure sign of it. I think over things to myself, and I say Jim's like the hautboy without lips to blow the reed. He wants to be played upon, he does."

"One of these days, perhaps you'll see your hopes for him fulfilled," said Clara.

"Thank you, Miss; thank you," said Simeon, with a bow. "Your cousin, the young doctor, sometimes calls in to see Jim, and cheers me up about him. The thought sometimes comes to me as I'm playing the organ. The organ's a rare thing for giving one thoughts one can't get no way by one's self; and then, I think, one day there will

come a hand and a voice that will bid my lad stand up from his grave-clothes and become a living man. I may not live to see it—I may not. It was my fault the lad's soft."

Here Simeon wiped away a tear.

- "How?—through drinking?" asked Clara, gently.
- "So it was. You see, Miss," he added in a tone of feeble apology, "I had lost a thing I loved dearly.
  - "Your wife?"
- "No; my violin. You may laugh, Miss Saville, but oh! it was better than a friend to me. It could not lend me money, but it lent me cheer, and it talked to me as the organ talks to young Mr. Latheby."
  - "Did you sell it?"
- "No; I pawned it—one night we had no bread. I'll not say harm of my wife. Lord have mercy upon her!—but what with the

thought of her lying stark in the Pool, and my not being able to get back my violin—for the broker had sold it when I got the money together—I've not been like up to keeping right ever since."

There was a pause. Then Clara said: "Does Mr. Latheby play well?"

"Play!" cried Simeon, clasping his hands, and pressing them close up to his chest. "Play!" he repeated after a pause placed there for lack of words to fill it. "That young man might have played on the day of his birth, only it takes wire in the fingers, not wax and dimples;" and Simeon opened his claw-like fingers. "Soon as he could wrestle with the grandeur of the organ it was his slave. May-be it's sinful, it being Papist music; but when I hear him play, I could go down on my knees, for I feel as if the Lord were near."

"You must smuggle me into the organloft next time he comes to practise," said Clara, softly.

"Ah, Miss, that's not possible—not possible," said Simeon, shaking his head with the portentous gravity of one, who looking at a request all round sees no way of granting it. "I'm under a promise to the young gentleman not to let any one up to the loft. The Rector lets us keep the door of the church locked those times he practises. You see strangers used to come. They had heard of the blind gentleman and the trial about the property, who played so finely, and they'd come to listen. It put out Mr. Latheby dreadful. He'd stop playing when he thought any one was there."

"I heard," said Clara, laughing, "someone offered to write about him in the papers."

"Yes, Miss, so a gentleman did. Mr. Latheby was playing, I remember it plain as yesterday, a fugue of Bach. He was all in a quiver, as he always is, when he's playing the organ. His face looks like something on which the wind's blowing shadow and brightness. Sudden the door opens, and a gentleman comes in. Mr. Latheby stops playing with a crash, and stands up, facing him. I felt spinning like a tee-totum. Sometimes Mr. Latheby, when he's disturbed at his music, looks at one like a ghost. The other gentleman says, very hearty and kind, 'If he'll answer some questions, people would like to read about him, and he would put what he said in a paper."

"Poor Mr. Latheby, what did he answer?" asked Clara.

"By the looks of him, I saw, Miss, he

thought 'twas uncommon droll. But he only says, very gravely, 'That would be too much fame. An humble individual like myself likes the privilege of privacy.' Those were his words—I remember them; and making a bow he takes up his hat and away he walks. From that we keep the door locked. Not a note would the young gentleman play if he thought some one was listening—not a note."

"But you must let me in," said Clara;
"I'll make myself as small, and keep as still, as a mouse; or I can blow the bellows as well as Jimmy."

"Bless you, Miss, you're too delicate for that; it's not lady's work," answered Simeon, puckering up his face into a smile at the idea of Clara performing the necessary gymnastics. "It goes hard against me to say no to you; but Mr. Latheby has such ears. He like see and hears with them; but if you come the day after to-morrow, a little before three, I'll try to worm you in."

"I'll be there at a quarter to three," said Clara, casting a bright smile on the old man.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"All through my keys, that gave their sounds to a wish of my soul,

All through my soul, that praised as its wish flowed visibly forth,

All through music and me."-Abt Vogler.

On the appointed day, before the appointed hour, Simeon was waiting under the church porch. "I hope the young lady will not have on a dress that rustles like paper," mumbled the frightened organist, who had taken only a small glass of spirits to support himself under the ordeal.

The carriage drove up punctually to the minute, and Clara stepped out, radiant, dainty—"a picture," old Simeon thought, in her large hat and simple muslin dress that made no rustle.

"There's a parcel in the carriage, Mr.

Hillier," she said with dimpling cheeks, and the merriest, kindest, archest look in her grey eyes.

It was a long box of a queer, coffin-like shape. Holding it in his arms, Simeon's fears fell away, under a rush of the most melting associations.

"You may open it. It's for you; and I hope you'll like it," said Clara, when they had reached the sainted organ-loft, with the cobwebs in the corners, in which dwelt spiders, pampered upon Handel and Beethoven. On the worm eaten oak benches and screen lay the precious sunshine, streaming through the shafted window.

If Simeon's heart had been a pump-handle it could not have worked more vigorously than it did, as his poor old fingers fumbled at the lock of the case. It opened at last, and there was a fiddle, with strings like silver, a bow, and a reel of gut and some resin. There

it was, the counterpart, only more shining, more dapper, more beautiful than the one he had parted with twelve years ago. It had an Allegro smile, from peg to sounding-board. The bridge, with its strings of silver and amber, seemed a bridge for tripping fairy notes.

That parting from the old violin had remained ever fresh in his memory. The silent misery with which he had braced himself up to it; the tears that had fallen over the strings as he played every tune upon them for the last time. He remembered how they wailed in answer, as on his way to Henshaw, where the sacrifice was to be consummated, he had taken the dear instrument out of its case, and under the wintry sky had said another farewell to it. There was a violin, in a new and splendid music-shop at Henshaw, that Simeon coveted as Mr. Latheby coveted the Towers. He would go

to look at it with covetous despair, every time he went to the town. Now those companionless years were at an end. Oh! the delicious thrill that went through Simeon's collar-bone and arm, as he laid the fiddle in its accustomed place, and bent his head over it.

"The bonnie thing! there it goes, singing sighing as if it had a winsome and There it is, at its tricks again, a carolling and thrilling up and downnot one forgotten," said Simeon, with fond and foolish accents, making the fiddle go through all its paces. "God bless you, Miss!" he cried suddenly, interrupting himself. "I had forgotten to thank you, being all of a whirl, you see. I had no more thought of hearing that bonnie music again than I had of hearing Uncle Robin, who gave it me. Look here, Miss," (with a sob,) "I take it I've been always craving for the VOL. II.

sound of it these years—and took a drop to give me cheer to bear the silence—but never a drop shall I take again now I've got him to talk to me."

"That will be my best thanks, Mr. Hillier, and who knows, perhaps your son may get to learn it."

"You've said it, Miss," cried Simeon, with fiddle-bow and head uplifted. That'll be the voice will call up the lad's soul, and wake it. Only yesterday, the doctor, your cousin, said to me: 'Music would do wonders for your lad; you ought to play every day to him.' I had no fiddle then; but now I'll send that insinuating voice talking to Jim. It's a grand instrument, the organ—none like it to talk to the Lord with; but to the humble souls who're dumb, I take it there's nothing like the fiddle. It's always in my thoughts Jimmy's soul's all right—but it's dumb, miss—deaf and dumb—

and the fiddle will speak to it and for it it will.

"Hush! I hear a step!" said Clara, retreating to the furthest corner of the loft. "Don't mention the violin, Mr. Hillier."

A moment after the door opened, and Cecil, guided by Jimmy, walked in. His face and bearing made Clara think of the old fables that said, the Gods struck with blindness those who had dared to look upon them.

"Good-day, Mr. Hillier. See, this morning's post brought me 'The Wedding March' from the Lohengrin. Would you mind going over it for me? My ears are thirsty to hear it," said Cecil, with anticipation in his voice.

"I'll try it, sir." I'll do my best," said Simeon, perching himself before the organ.

Cecil sat beside it, his head bent, his arms tight crossed over his chest.

But Simeon was not up to the occasion.

The thought of the violin behind him got between him and the notes.

"I am afraid it is too difficult for reading at first sight," said Cecil, lifting his head after some futile efforts on Simeon's part to produce harmony. "If you would play for me once more that arrangement of the 'Chorale Symphony,' I think I could begin practising it."

Simeon began, but his fingers were entangled with memories and hopes, and could not play.

"I should prefer practising alone to-day," said Cecil, with indulgent displeasure in his voice.

"I know you think, sir, it's the drink that makes my fingers no more good than a baby's to-day," said Simeon, "but it's not. It's that something has happened."

"Nothing disagreeable, I hope."

"Disagreeable!" burst out Simeon, softly laughing to himself, and rubbing his fingers up and down over his pointed knees, forgetting his fright of the blind young gentleman in his happiness. "It's something wonderful. Something like resurrection-day come unexpected."

"Why, Hillier, is it some old friend or old love come back?" asked Cecil, laughing. "There; I won't detain you; I shall practise alone to-day."

Hillier scrambled down his seat, and looked towards Clara, making signs of appreciation and wonder at the young gentleman's discernment.

- "Go to whatever or whoever calls you?" said Cecil, seating himself before the organ.
- "Sir," said Hillier, hesitatingly, "I'm uncommon sorry."
- "Don't be sorry, man, go —I prefer being alone," said Cecil.

Then Simeon grasped the violin and the case. At the door, however, he paused and glanced towards Clara. She nodded, and she also made a gesture bidding him depart. The next moment the door had closed upon Simeon and his fiddle.

Then Cecil began practising with a will, making Clara smile. He seemed like a young Titan hewing masses of sound out of the silence. His figure swayed backward and forward; the shadow of his wild hair fell on the glistening tubes. After a while, he paused; and then with rare abandon and pathos he played a Latin hymn.

As Cecil played, he was merged in the worship of the multitudes who had sung it. He was under a spell; his senses lethargic, but his soul intensely awake. Was this the primeval, universal language—that of emotion—prior to the one of thought and word? For now he felt the vague unrest

of nature. Then he was steeped in tender awe, such as must have flooded the hearts of the old Pre-Raphaelite painters, when they depicted Christ—no God enthroned in glory, impassive, yet all-powerful;—but pallid, worn, a face of infinite sympathy; that of the Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Then, again, he touched some chords, and it was no longer unrest, but peace with him; stars in the sky and glowworms in the dells. Lt was 'Midsummer Night's Dream'; blue, mysterious, elfin all about him.

Clara had heard finer music, but there are moments when music awakens applause, and passes; and there are moments when the same music, albeit heard silently, has a spell. There was something saddening, no doubt, in the blind face of the performer. There was something slightly ghostly in his

utter unconsciousness of her presence; but it was a fact that her eyes filled with tears, and she was very near yielding to an hysterical sob.

A voice talking broke the charm. At the other side of the organ worked a sort of human mole—Jimmy at the bellows.

- "Are you tired, Jimmy?" asked Cecil.
- "No, no, sir; never tired blowing," came the lad's guttural accents.

The charm was dispelled. Clara began to wish to make Cecil know she was there. She watched him from her corner, debating with herself how to reveal the fact. She saw him smile, with an expression of amused remembrance; then suddenly he began playing the arrangement of the *Miserere* she had played on the previous Sunday. This was the right moment. Clara got up, and gathering her white, noiseless skirts with her left hand, crossed on tip-toe over to

the organ. Then, as Cecil was concluding the hymn, she laid one soft hand on the keys, and accompanied him in the last notes. She watched his look of astonishment; then he stopped.

"Is that you, Hillier, again? I thought you had gone." He put out his hand, and touched her fingers.

"It's only I!" said Clara, in the voice of a child caught at mischief.

He reddened, and turned his face towards her. "Saint Cecilia!" he said.

- "You would ask," replied Clara, "what business have I to be here?"
- "You have every right to be here," he

"A very gracious, humble answer," said Clara. "I breathe again. Like king Ahasuerus, you have lowered your sceptre. I have been in such a fright. Mr. Hillier has given you such a character."

- "What character?"
- "He said that my life would pay for being here. He described how you secretly played awful rites upon the treble; and blasphemies upon the bass. He assured me that if you discovered me you would brain me with a missal, or spit me upon a brass tube. Is it a very impudent intrusion?"
  - "How long have you been here?"
- "Perhaps while twenty-five bars were played da capo and da capo. I love music. Play the Miserere for me again."
- "I'll play you something else," said Cecil.
- "No, no. I am learning the *Miserere*. It is the only piece I can play respectably—the one ewe lamb of my *repertoire*—and I want it to be at its best."
- "You played it well last Sunday," said Cecil. "Will you pardon my conceit if I correct you in one place?" She sat down

close beside him; but they did not practise long before they fell to chat.

- "I have a quarrel with you," said Clara, "and I must have it out."
  - "It takes two to quarrel," smiled Cecil.
- "Well, I have a scolding to administer. If I were like other young ladies I would hold my tongue."
- "I am in luck that you are not. What is it?"
- "Why have you not called upon my mother?"
- "I have not the pleasure of knowing her," said Cecil.
- "Then why not come to see me, your enemy and your friend since infancy?"
- "You were very welcome when you came to us," answered Cecil, evading the question.
- "And you would have been welcome to me," said Clara, with ingenuous frankness.
  - "Did you ever hear the story of the

philosophic beggar, Miss Saville?" he asked.

"No. Tell it me. I am sure you are great at a tale."

"Well, this beggar was passing a young lord's door, and looked in through the open window at the feasting. The freakish young lord within called to him, brought him in, and offered a brimming glass of champagne to his parched lips. What do you think he did?"

"Tossed it off and asked for another," said Clara.

"He tasted it, and laid it down. 'No,' he said; 'I shall long for it, and a glass of champagne will never come a second time to these lips of mine.' So he went out content."

"And how does this apply?" asked Clara.

"I am poor, Miss Saville; and, sadder still, I am blind. Your company and sympathy are my glass of champagne."

"You shall have bumpers of it and bottles

of it," said Clara, with a laugh. "You're taking another sip now. How do you like it?"

"Well—too well," smiled Cecil. "I have not much philosophy. I shall go and see you whenever you ask me."

"I'll put you to the test very soon," she said.

Then they began to chat of other matters. She told him how the Farehamites appeared to her after her travels on the Continent. A little tone of solitariness pierced through her raillery. "And you," she said, brusquely, "must feel lonely amongst these good people, without an ideal, without purpose in life beyond their range of village interests and gossip."

"I am not lonely here. Here I have generations of children. Listen!" said Cecil—calling to Jimmy, he pulled some stops and ran his fingers over the notes, raising a silvery choir—"these are my school-children. Do you hear how they

babble and play as they patter homewards? And these are my fair women of old. How they laugh, and how they wail! This is Medea; do you hear her shriek? And this is Helen of Troy—goddess and queen. And soft—the gipsy enchantress, with her discords and her tender harmonies—

'No more, but e'en a woman; and commanded By such poor passion as the maid that milks, And does the meanest chares.'

And here are my heroes. Do you hear how they mutter?—and how their shields clash? Can I be lonely with all those crowds about me?"

"They are ghosts only," said Clara, quickly. "I think there is a sequel to your story of the philosophic beggar, Mr. Latheby. When he refused that glass of champagne he was laughing in his sleeve at the freakish lord who offered it. He liked good spring water gushing fresh from the rocks better."

"True, they are only ghosts; and better a living lassie than a dead classic queen," said Cecil, lightly.

"Which is a courteous way of saying, better a living doggie than a dead lion; especially when that doggie would lead you through all the streets—and roads—"

Here she stopped, with a great blush, at the thoughtless allusion to his blindness. He said nothing, but he did not seem displeased.

- "Do you know," resumed Clara, with perceptible hesitation, "that since I am here I have been revolving in my mind how I can put a petition to you into words; but now I hesitate to do it."
  - "Why do you hesitate?" he asked.
- "Because, for all your pretty parable, I do not feel as if you were true to the pact we made—to be friends."

- "Yet there was truth in the parable," he replied.
- "But you have promised to forswear philosophy?"
- "I have," he said, with emphasis. "What is the request, Miss Saville?—you know I will grant it if I can."
- "It is so easy for you to grant, that if you do not—I shall feel—that although you do not acknowledge it, you may forgive, but you do not forget the past."
- "There was nothing to forgive," he began.
- "There was—everything," she interrupted, hurriedly. "I know it, and it is a token of forgiveness I ask. You see," she went on, a little faltering, "I am lonely. Although it may not appear so, there is much in my life to trouble and sadden me. I want a solace. Music is my glass of champagne. Will you let me be your pupil?"

- "My pupil!" he repeated; and a slight change passed over his face.
- "I mean," she said gently, "I ask a learned friend to guide a very ignorant one."
- "It is as a friend you ask me, Miss Saville," he said, pointedly.
  - "Yes; as a friend," she repeated.
- "Do you wish me to come to the Towers?" he asked.
- "No; oh no!" she answered. "Nor for me to go to the Dower House. It is the organ I want to learn. Here—in this dear old loft; and Simeon will be my chaperon.

He was silent; then he said, as if talking to himself, "Let it be." "I shall be proud and honoured, Miss Saville," he added, turning to her.

Then they settled the days she should come for her lesson.

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## CHAPTER IX.

"So she, like many another babbler, hurt
Whom she would soothe, and harmed where she would
heal."—Guinevere.

Two months have elapsed since the last chapter. It is early in September now, and it is late afternoon. The splendid goodnight of the sun shines on the stubble of the reaped fields. A light veil of mist is over the sea, through which some distant sails are gleaming.

Simeon Hillier is making his way to Doctor Raikes' surgery. His head, though bent, is wagging occasionally; his long fore-finger is sometimes raised. The organist is engaged in earnest confabulation with himself. Fred lives a little way out of Fareham, within easy reach of the Towers, and Simeon

has plenty of time to discuss the subject on his mind in inward tête-à-tête with himself.

Simeon believes in the Doctor, as he calls Fred, as a poodle believes in his master. The Doctor is treating Jimmy according to a method of his own. Clara had asked Fred to take up the case of the half-witted boy, and Fred has devoted his care to him ever since. The mind is not to be treated like gout or a catarrh; and Fred talks to Jimmy, stooping to his level, drawing his attention to all the simple natural objects Beginning at the beginning of about. observation, he is patiently seeking to awaken Jimmy's mind. He allows the lad to go out alone, always tempting him to stay in the fresh air. Jimmy used to go out with a little spade and pail, and dig the sand, gathering feathers of different lengths, and bits of stick. Simeon had sought to stop this habit, for it exposed him to the

ridicule of the boys and the neighbours; but the Doctor encouraged it, and would admire the pretty feathers Jimmy brought, pointing out the differences between them to him. Jimmy was beginning to sort the feathers intelligently, and to keep apart those of the sea-birds he found scattered on the beach from those of the water-hen and kingfisher that he occasionally picked up on the banks of the river. The "dead man's pool "had an attraction for Jimmy. He knew dimly that his mother was asleep below in it; and there was a ghostly pathos in coming across the slouching lad at his games in the lonely spot. Jimmy was also beginning to collect shells. He picked them carefully out of the sand, and brought them in his pail to Cecil, for it was to Cecil his allegiance belonged. He could not remember their names, yet he sorted them accurately. Cecil's praise delighted Jimmy, and helped the treatment. He had been deaf at first to the fiddle's voice, but Fred had given him a musical-box, and taught him to turn the handle, and had noted the idiotic smile, like a cloud with the sun behind it, veining it with faint light. Now Jimmy occasionally looked up when Simeon played the violin to him, and when the tune was very merry and brisk he sometimes wagged his head and laughed a discordant laugh.

The little sun behind the cloud was gathering force.

In all the world there was but one woman Simeon considered worthy to be Doctor Fred's wife, and that was Clara. "Bless her," he ruminated; "she is the seventh—he is the tonic—and when it will be struck the scale will be that perfect." But of late Simeon had grown fidgetty. Something threatened to interfere with the perfection of the scale. Those practisings of Cecil and

Clara on the organ continued. They had begun by being once a week; they had grown to be twice; occasionally even to thrice in the week. Simeon was now on his way to Doctor Fred to tell him the danger ahead.

Doctor Fred's house, where he had his surgery and consulting-room for his host of non feeing patients, was an old-fashioned brick mansion covered with creepers. The Doctor was occupied when Simeon asked for him, but the old organist declared his intention to wait.

There had been an outbreak of malignant fever in the dilapidated cottages, and Doctor Fred was in and out on his rounds all day. Hercules cleaning the Augean stables had not harder work than the Doctor in making war against filth and its attendant diseases.

The labourers mostly resented interference, while the farmers viewed with suspicion the disturber of peaceful dirt, and the awakener of the labourer's self-respect.

When Simeon was admitted to the Doctor's presence he found him in his consulting-room with its worn leather sofa, that many a time of late had served Fred for a bed. furniture was ascetically simple: a book-case of scientific books, several cases of surgical instruments, and a number of mysterious phials. The only ornaments were two large photographs hanging up in frames-one of Strasburg Cathedral, which Fred had visited in company of Mrs. Saville and her daughter; the other, of the portrait of Nelly O'Brien by Sir Joshua Reynolds, in which Fred saw a resemblance to Clara. On the table close to a magnifying-glass was a certain kind of wild flower, of a cup-like shape and coral-The Doctor had noted it making the meadows glow, and he had got Jimmy to transplant him a potfull. The scarlet colour, Doctor Fred felt certain, betokened iron in the soil; and he contemplated making a study of the plant in his leisure moments. Amongst his hobbies Doctor Fred had that of botany. A small paper of shells gathered by Jimmy lay near the pot.

When Simeon entered the Doctor turned. His thin, sensitive countenance bore some traces of weariness. Tired as Fred looked to-day yet Simeon felt it did his old heart good to look at him.

"Good-day, Hillier; I hope you've not come to see me because you are out of sorts." Fred said.

"Well, sir, I may say I do feel out of sorts, but not on account of illness; it's something on my mind makes me feel out of tune," said Simeon, playing a grave accompaniment to his words by the slow wagging of his head.

"Indeed; I'm sorry to hear that. Jimmy

is getting better than I had anticipated. To-day I saw him watching a spider making his web, with the eye of a naturalist. The lad will soon beat us all as a collector. Look at those shells!—I trust it's nothing about him that is troubling you. Come, sit down. Out with it, man."

The Doctor had sat down in his large armchair all attention. Simeon sat opposite, his hat deposited at his feet, his two hands joined on the top of his stick.

Before settling down in Fareham, to be near Mrs. Saville, Fred had not taken ordinary practice. He had devoted himself to hospital work—following lectures and making experiments, especially directing his attention to diseases of the brain and nervous system. It was his belief, that if properly treated in childhood, such affections might be cured. Outdoor life, patiently trained observation of nature, and music,

were the influences to be brought to bear on the disordered nerves. Like all young theorists, he was of a very sanguine nature. His emotional temperament sometimes made him rash. He had made some serious mistakes, not having that disciplined experience gained only by a wide range of observation, and was on such occasions temporarily humbled. But temperament is potent, and quickly resumes its sovereignty. He had often been right, but he was sometimes disastrously wrong. Fred already beheld Jimmy, not only brought to the threshold of reasonable existence, but he saw him clothed and in his right mind.

"Well, Doctor," said Simeon, who began to feel the subject more difficult of approach than he had anticipated when he discussed it to himself along the road, "it's about something that's an uncommon worry to me. It's not about Jim; though Jim has been, as it were, the cause of my thoughts on the subject."

"Yes; I know Jim is always in your thoughts," said Fred, encouragingly, utterly at a loss, patiently waiting for Simeon to wipe his forehead.

"Yes, sir, that's it; Jim's always in my thoughts; and now you've taken him up, I feel as if I should see him yet with his tongue loosed and his eyes bright—a man, every inch of him. I feel it, Doctor; I feel it. The fiddle could not have done it, though the lad's beginning to take to it rarely."

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"No; the fiddle could not have done it, alone," said Fred, with a smile; "but come, Hillier, what's on your mind? We've not come to that yet."

"I'm coming to it, sir; I'm coming. Well, you see, it was Miss Saville gave me the fiddle; and when she gave it to me, she says, 'Perhaps your son will learn it some

day.' She did, bless her. She saw the boy had music in him. There's no one here sees it, but she does. Then you come, Doctor, and you're wiser than Miss Saville, nor me, and you say the fiddle's not enough; and you put out your hand, and perhaps, Doctor, you'll think it's like taking the words of Scripture in vain, but I say it in reverence, it's been like the Lord's hand on the boy healing him."

Doctor Fred smiled, and shook his head. "To the point, Hillier."

"Sir, I beg your pardon, let me go on. It's a thing as one may not say at a jump. It must be gone delicate to," replied Simeon, with a deprecatory lifting of his whole hand. 'Well, thinks I to myself—minding of Miss Saville giving me the violin, and of you taking up the lad—thinks I when I'm playing to myself, 'What a wonder is the fiddle! There it is, not able to give out a sound,

though it's got strings, and pegs, and sounding-board; and not a hand can make it give out a note until the bow comes dragging over it; then out it sings more blithe and sweet than the thrush.' Then says I, to myself, 'That's what's meant by the marriages made in heaven, for they're not all made there.' It's like the bow and the fiddle making music together, and all dumb apart. And, says I to myself, making so bold to repeat it to you, 'Dr. Raikes and Miss Saville together will make an instrument complete on which the angels will play That's what I think to myself, tunes.' begging your pardon, Doctor, for repeating."

As Simeon was speaking Fred's eyes had deepened into that liquid glow that tells of a mind absorbed in contemplating inward images, and his lips quivered.

"Look here, Hillier," he said quickly, yet

with a strange, soft undertone in his voice, "You've no business to make a young lady the subject of a parable. And now that you've said it to me, let it go no further. Young ladies' names are not to be handled as you handle the strings of your violin. Is this all you had to tell me?"

"No, sir, that's only the beginning," answered Simeon, shaking inwardly, as he had never yet done in Fred's presence.

"I would never have said it, not even to you, sir, only to my fiddle, and it's not I says things to it, but it says them to me; its voice like trips through me and makes all sorts of things spring up. I've been bothered of late, sir; for knowing Mrs. Saville's always ill, and you so busy with the labourers, it's been on my mind you've not known Miss Saville practises every Tuesday and Saturday, and sometimes of a Thursday, with young Mr. Latheby up in the organ-loft."

- "Practises with Mr. Latheby since when?"
- "Well, sir, it's now coming eight weeks. She's his pupil—next Thursday it will be eight weeks—I remember 'twas a Thursday she began—for she begins with the choir—and—"
- "Eight weeks!" repeated Fred, with a slight frown.
- "Well, sir, may be I ought to have mentioned it before—but Miss Saville, the first day, she says so pretty to me, 'You're to stay while I have my lesson, Mr. Hillier, but you're not to tell anybody or I'd get into a scrape.' So I did not speak; yet I've been uncommon moved to tell you, Doctor."
- "And why should she not be Mr. Latheby's pupil? What of that, man?" said Fred, steadying his voice, and fixing his eyes scrutinizingly on Simeon's face.
  - "Nothing, sir, nothing," Hillier hastened

gentleman—the handsomest, best gentleman. It makes the heart sore to think he's blind, and all his fortune gone; and when he plays, sir, it's so tuneful you clean forget all his misfortunes. He's got a heart too. Next to you, sir, there's none so friendly to my lad as he is. But, you see—begging your pardon, if I've made too bold—turning it over in my mind, I thinks it my duty to tell you of these practisings."

"And why should they not practise together? Music is good for everybody, is it not?" said Fred, with the unjust testiness we visit upon the bringer of unwelcome tidings.

"There's practising, and there's practising. Doctor," replied Simeon, with some show of spirit. "There's the way Mr. Latheby practises with me—all attention and not a word that's not to the purposeand when I play a new piece to him, he hearkening with the muscles of his forehead standing out like ropes, no more thinking of me than he does of the pedal. But Lord! that's not the way he and Miss Saville practise together. There they sit, side by side, and look as cosy and bright as if they were sitting in the middle of a bit of sunshine I She plays a little, and he half cannot see. smiles and half scolds her; and she looks up into his blind face with soft eyes all shining. Sometimes she speaks so coaxing to him, and then he talks to her as I did not know Mr. Latheby, who's so dark and silent, could talk about music, and what he wants to write; and she listens, breathing a little hard, and her cheeks a little deeper colourand sometimes she quarrels with him—and that's the sweetest of all. And the other day he told her how he felt being blind like being in a prison—and useless—and what VOL. II. 32

that glimmer of light he still has is to him. I could not help hearing him. They always ask me to stay; and I saw the tears trickle down Miss Saville's cheeks. I watch it all, Doctor, as you watch the fever in the cottages. I see every sign of it."

A flash passed over Fred's face. As Simeon spoke his eyes had gained a depth of unexpressed passion. The old organist, however, saw no change.

Fred tried to speak, but something in his throat prevented his utterance; at last he said in a voice that to his own ears did not sound like his own, it seemed so distant and thin: "Well, suppose they are happy together! That fiddle of yours is a gossip, Hillier. Don't listen to its babble too much. Here are two young people fond of music. They meet to play, perhaps to talk. Would it not—" Here his voice suddenly failed, and the sentence remained unfinished.

"Well, Doctor," said Simeon rising, "you're cleverer than Miss Saville or me, and you're sure to see the rights of the thing. It's been an uncommon worry to me—and I had no peace until I told you; for, says I, 'the Doctor will set it all right.' You'll forgive my making so free as telling you my thoughts of you and Miss Clara."

"Hush!—no more of that," said Fred, putting a hand that trembled a little on Hillier's arm. "Don't make more parables. They're dangerous things to meddle with. My cousin and myself bear no visible or invisible resemblance to your violin and bow, man."

"No, sir; certainly not, no more parables," said Simeon, again raising two deprecating hands.

"And, I say, Hillier," called out Fred, with affected indifference, as the organist was turning away, "you've not spoken of those practisings down in the village, have you?"

- "No, sir; never a word."
- "Nobody knows anything about them?"
- "Not to my knowledge, sir, except Mr. Latheby's father."
  - "Ah! he knows!" said Fred.
- "Yes, sir; he's always in and out of the library. He's uncommon fond of the old books there;—and since Miss Saville comes I've met him loitering about—like watching. He told me he knew she came—and like you, sir, he tells me not to talk of it—nor to tell her or his son he knows of the lessons."
- "I understand," said Fred, shortly, an angry flush rising to his forehead.
- "Miss Saville, she comes in by the back way—crossing over all alone from the wood behind the Towers;—and she's so busy managing the choir, nobody would think

anything if they see her crossing over to the church."

"Just so," said Fred. "Now go; and mind, say nothing about all this."

When Simeon had turned his back and shut the door, the expression of indifference he had sought to affect faded from Fred's countenance. He, always so busy, sat there in his lonely study for more than an hour, idle and alone. Of late he had felt a change in Clara's ways towards him. In her easy good-humoured badinage there had lurked a sting. Sometimes she had manifested a great impatience towards him; often she treated him with a de haut en bas demeanour that kept him at an unhappy distance. If she had thought to chill him, this had proved unsuccessful treatment. had inflamed, attracted, enslaved him the more.

A knock roused Fred. "It can't be; it may

be all exaggeration," he muttered to himself. He got up and went into the surgery, where some patients waited for him. He heard their complaints; he listened to the garrulous recitals of their misfortunes. brought a tale of rheumatism, and rain coming through the roof; another spoke of the effect of the weather on his humble occupation, and of the sick wife at home. Fred answered all with a quick, forced voice. He wrote out prescriptions. He gave medicines and ointments. He promised to attend to the needed repairs. When his patients left him, still he lingered.

It was late now. He had purposely allowed the dinner-hour at the Towers to pass. He now put on his hat and wandered towards the house.

## CHAPTER X.

"Each revelation to mankind vouchsafed
Hath come, encompassed by mighty storms,
Laying blind nations low; each gift from Heaven
Hath claimed its price in combat; for without
Battle unto death is nought maintained."

An Hour Ago.

FRED walked up to the Towers with head bent; slowly, somewhat heavily. It was a still, sultry evening. The blue of the sky had that unfathomable darkness but seldom seen in England. Far spread across it lay scattered a handful of meek stars. Over the brooding cedar in the lawn, Jupiter hung like a bird of fire, with quivering wings.

A pile of chimneys stood out in massive shadow against the light of the harvest moonrise. Fred made his way across the

shrubberies, across the lawn, gray-lit by the brightness above, and ascended the stone steps of the terrace that ran along the front of the house.

One of the drawing-room windows was ajar; Fred leant against a stone vase, and looked in. The room, hung with tapestries and pictures, was so dimly lit that all the pretty modern knick-knacks were lost in the prevailing gloom. It had an air of oppressive magnificence, relieved by two focusses of homely light. A wood-fire burnt in the deep chimney; and near it, with a screen drawn round her, Mrs. Saville lay reading on a sofa. Her austere features looked worn and pale in the glow of the embers. Towards the other circle of brightness, shed by two wax candles, Fred looked. Near the open window, Clara sat playing some religious music on the piano. The light fell on her halfbared arms, escaping from aerial draperies,

and on her lithe hands pressing the notes. She was prettily and quaintly dressed, in a clinging white material, through which a slight gold thread ran, glinting here, lost in shadow there. The delicate piquant profile was turned to Fred. Clara seemed absorbed in listening to her music. Her head was bent, but sometimes she slightly raised her eyes slowly, as if their lids were weighted; and sometimes, too, she smiled a little smile, that came and went lingeringly. Fred looked at the dainty vivid-hued beauty, whose every detail of pose and expression had for him a mystery and a charm. To-night, an indefinable change had passed over it. seemed to him at once more brilliant and It was as if she was surrounded by a luminous haze. He remained watching every movement she made; until, rising to obey her mother's request to shut the window, Clara discovered him.

- "Here comes Doctor Factotum! Always at his post!"
- "At my post those ten minutes, but spell-bound," he replied.
- "Ah! I wish I could put a spell upon you!" she said, with a slight upward movement of her chin.
  - "What would you do?"
- "I don't know yet. Perhaps turn you into a frog, and shut you up in an oak tree for a thousand years. Come in; mamma wants you."

The sound of her nephew's voice, and his entrance into the room, had the effect upon Mrs. Saville's countenance of a gleam of sunlight let into the chill dark. For the poor hypochondriac, whose interests had narrowed to the range of sickly self-absorption, Fred had fascination. His effusive sympathy cheered her like a tonic. Her attitude grew

more alert, her eye brighter and more expectant.

"You are late, Fred. We waited dinner for you," she said.

"I am sorry you waited. You know, of late, I cannot be relied upon, aunt," he replied, kissing the hand she gave him.

"We waited," said Clara, "until the dishes were fumeless and savourless, and the delicious souffiée was as depressed as a snubbed lover."

"What adequate apology can I make?" said Fred, looking at her with a smile.

"Make none, my dear. The dinner was not one bit spoilt. I was only afraid you were not coming," said Mrs. Saville, with a little touch of querulous affection. "Ring the bell for tea, Clara."

"Now, did you think I was going to let you off so easily, with those two games of draughts against me. Come, aunt, I am not such a mean-spirited fellow as that."

"What kept you? I expected you early. Joseph wanted to begin transplanting some trees, but I would have nothing done till you were consulted."

"Instead of transplanting trees I have been vaccinating babies, looking so good and smug until the lancet touched them, and then a scream like that of twenty peacocks. I have been giving ginger to Widow Hopkins for her spasms, and a liniment to Smith to rub on his aching old bones."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Saville. "You were born for something better than doctoring those poor people. My dear, you must soon give up this Quixotism. Come, sit down."

"Yes; sit down, Mr. Don Quixote!—an excellent likeness you present to the knight gone crazy for chivalry!" murmured Clara,

under her breath. "Would he flatter her thus, would he humbug the poor sick lady, would he play a little innocent game of draughts, if he were not playing another deep long game all the time?" and she turned and sat down again at the piano, till her mother fretfully told her to stop. Then she went out on the terrace, and presently feverishly came back again, and sat down like a pretty pussy crouched to spring.

Clara having always seen through the means by which Mrs. Saville laboured to create in her an attachment for Fred, those means had always been completely frustrated. She would often visit on her cousin the spleen she felt at hearing the continual sound of his praise in her ears. That he lent himself to her mother's schemes had been from the first and ever mainly the head and front of his offending. She set herself in continual opposition to them. But from motives

of her own, she had allowed herself to drift, and accepted or rather tolerated Fred as her He was a bullied lover, lacking manlover. liness and freedom in his love. In her heart she despised him a little for allowing himself to be thus tyrannized over by her, and was growing wearied of her power over him. Latterly, her latent prejudice against him had developed itself. Her mind had become filled with it; and in the light of prejudice she saw his deeds and heard his words. She indulged her secret jealousy of him, and resented his fulfilling many offices towards her mother that should have been hers by right. She was scornful with him for playing up to all her mother's whims and weaknesses. Then, she was irritated by his continual presence.

Those meetings in the organ-loft with Cecil Latheby were full of charm for Clara. It was a discovery, that organ-loft and her grave comrade! new seas to her, enchanted lands. Her wayward heart found a freshness and a mystery in it. Each daily little inroad into the reserve of her friend was something to be thought and pondered over in her lonely walks. He was the descendant of that long race of Lathebys-that descendant who was fairly king over her childish imagination, years ago. Her natural intelligence enabled her to feel the strength and culture of his intellect, which stimulated her conversation delightfully. His blindness moved her pity. The links that bound her to him were manifold. She liked him a little, as she might love a pet, to encourage, and guide, and play with. She liked him as a being she did not half understand. He had somewhat the charm of a secret idol, that none but herself might worship. She practised the old music that he loved; she studied thorough bass by herself, finding a pleasure in mastering the difficulties; her aim and her reward would be some day, perhaps, to write down music at his dictation. was coquettish also. She now read with the object to charm him by her talk. She sought to please him by covert womanly devices. Cecil had once casually said, that of all scents he preferred the heliotrope; and from that day she sprinkled her hair and her handkerchief with the perfume when she went for her lessons. Cecil had not called at the Towers, and she no longer asked him to do so. The secresy of those meetings added to their charm. There was a good deal of the feeling she used to have in her secret treasures, in their secret shrine, in her queer and secretive childhood. Only this treasure she could not handle, and play with, and kiss, as she used the old cedar fan, or the amber-coloured scent-bottle. Clara was womanly and child-like at the same timeimpetuous, suspicious, wilful; but one aspect of her nature was simple and sweet—winning sweet.

There had been no love-making in those meetings up in the organ-loft; and in her musings over them she had never asked herself if this was the beginning of love. She had lived in them questionless. But the night before, something had happened—Clara had had a dream, a dainty little dream.

She dreamt she was a child, and that she was out in the meadows, amongst the cowslips. Presently there joined her a boy, with a beautiful, mysterious face, in tattered clothes, and bare-foot. She did not know how he came, or the way he had come. She looked at him, wondering who he was, and what made his face so puzzling; when all at once she knew it was Cecil Latheby, and that he was blind. In her dream she took his thin little hand in hers, and they vol. II.

walked in the wood behind the Towers. And as they walked, an incomparable radiance flooded the house, the far-spreading verdure, the ferns, and speckled deer. The old trees stood out illumined, and all about them there was a stir, as of suspended life returning. Her companion in rags smiled, as he walked with head erect; the light fell on his tattered garments, on his bare feet, on his wan and stricken face; but she walked in shadow. Then it was suddenly borne in upon her that she had what was duly his. In her dream she lifted her arms and drew his face down to hers, and whispered that she gave it back all to him. She turned to run away; but she heard him following. And then she felt his arms about her, and a kiss was laid on her lips.

Clara awoke with a burning blush on her cheeks. She had felt oppressed and vaguely excited all day. The arrival of Fred had been the jar that had brought her back into ordinary existence, which had seemed invested with a strange sense of unreality. That jar was the shock by which her dislike of him first took substance, and her distrust and impatience crystallized into suspicion.

The sound of putting away the draughtsmen and board roused her from the reverie into which she had fallen. Fred was giving Mrs. Saville an account of the pitiable state of the cottages, and the squalor reigning within. He was describing graphically, and she was listening attentively.

"Fareham must be a whited sepulchre," put in Clara, abruptly, "with its cosy red roofs and hay-stacks, and its big green trees; it does not look the God-forsaken place you describe."

"I am not speaking so much of Fareham proper, although there are grim corners enough in it," replied Fred, turning to her, and caressing with his eyes the pretty, crouching figure. "I am speaking of villages a mile or two inland-villages such as Penham, where most of the labourers' cottages are, and which is part of this property. assure you, Clara (rising and standing before her, with his cup of tea in his hand), one of the greatest abominations in reality is often an English village nestling under its elm trees, a church steeple, with the sunshine upon it, in the centre. It all looks so good and religious. Faugh! it is a whited sepulchre! But I never forget," he went on in a voice of meaning, "that I am under a vow and an obligation to you to redeem the villages."

"I dare say, to all those rustics you appear in the light of a prince, who, when he is king, will be the Father of his people," said Clara, quickly.

"Not I. They hate me for ordering them

to wash and open their windows. It's a good, hard tussle between us who'll win; but I've made up my mind to. I've got an object that will make me," he said, looking at her in a way that made the blood thud angrily through her veins, and the room feel suddenly close.

Fred put down his cup, and returned to sit by Mrs. Saville. "And you must help me, aunt," he continued. "They won't budge a mile down-hill to get clean water. All they have, poor devils, is a ditch of fetid liquid, called water by courtesy, I suppose. They're an intemperate lot, but who can blame them? In such a place drink—gin, brandy, whisky—only abjure water and milk. To begin with, we must sink a well and put up a pump, aunt."

"Whatever you think right, Fred, you have my sanction to do as if you were in my place," said Mrs. Saville, putting her

pale hand on his coat-sleeve. He took it and pressed it.

"Give them gin, Fred," said Clara, from her corner; "gin means popularity, you know."

It certainly was not Fred's way when approaching a serious conversation, if Clara, after indulging him to a certain point, broke it off abruptly with some flighty misconstruction, to let it apparently have no more effect upon him than a breath upon a pane of glass. He always changed the conversation at her bidding and followed her lead; when she talked nonsense he laughed and cudgelled his brains for some witty speech; if she yawned he became dumb and watched her; if she left the room his thoughts followed her, and his brilliancy was extinguished. To-night, however, he remained apparently deaf to her interlude, and continued his talk, from the last link of sense, with just a

perceptible flurry in his voice. Clara felt this assertion of independence. At another time she might have liked him better for it; to-night it irritated her.

Fred spoke of his plans for the new cottages and schools. He had formulated a whole system of rewards and advantages to parents for sending their children to school. In Penham especially a form of scrofula was prevalent which developed cases of mental decrepitude. Fred now mounted his favourite hobby of the manner in which to treat the nervous affections of children. He addressed all his conversation to his aunt, and his confidence was infectious. Mrs. Saville smiled, and her eyes filled with tears. Clara moved impatiently on her chair.

"Ah, yes! she believes in him, she sees no flaw in him. Yet I know there is a flaw, a great flaw, although he manages to ring so true. It is all done for an object," she murmured to herself. Then she rose and said brusquely, looking at Fred as she passed him: "Some men look upon good actions as commodities, like treacle or candles; they bring them to market."

She went out into the garden; the moon had gathered light, extinguishing that of the stars; its white radiance lay large and hallowed over the trim lawns and flower-beds. The trees stood still, their great branches like the uplifted arms of patriarchs in prayer. Light, motionless shadows lay on the ground. There was a supernatural stillness abroad, and yet that sense of brooding pain that makes the influence of moonlight so mysteriously contradictory. Clara hurried along, no visible companion near her; but before her visions rose and flitted. Anyone watching her would have known she was under the sway of overmastering emotions. walked quickly, her eyes intent, yet evidently

unconscious of all surrounding objects. She was not aware of the moon, sending pale shafts of light through the dim alleys, yet the restlessness within her was increased by her intense participation in the uncanny stillness and the wakefulness around her.

"How he keeps alluding to the vague promise I gave him. He knows I do not love him, yet he will try to claim me by it," she muttered. "He is so cool-headed; he sets so cleverly to work with mamma. I could as well thwart his plans as this waterlily with its leaves could divert the current of the river."

She had passed the shrubberies, and was standing on the outskirts of a plantation, through which ran a broad stream. As she stood under the trees she looked towards the Towers, lifting themselves up in grand spaces of light and shadow.

She looked up with an indefinable ex-

pression. Fear and determination, anger and softness, alternately drifted over her face.

"I wish, oh, I wish, I could give it all back to you, Cecil," she murmured, feeling as if she were still in her dream.

When Clara came in by the hall-door, Fred was leading her mother up the stairs to her room. It was his habit every evening to escort his aunt to her door. Clara watched with a little angry smile the two retreating figures; Fred, suiting his pace to her mother's faltering steps, bending over and talking to her. Clara could hear her mother's feeble laugh. When they had reached the landing she returned to the drawing-room, and impatiently flung open all the windows. Fred followed soon after. She was now standing by her mother's table holding the medicine-bottle.

"What was the last?" she said. "Was

it a little saffron and filtered water? Try toast, Fred; it gives such a fine, deep, rich colour. It looks like a tonic."

Fred smiled. "Although I don't plead guilty to making up bottles of coloured water, are you not aware, Clara, of the power of the imagination for beneficial purposes? It is not in the ordinary pharmacopæia that you will find a remedy for jarred nerves and cheer for a mind unstrung. What comforts and soothes an invalid is the best tonic."

"The bread - pills," continued Clara;

"are they also for cheer? Those nice,
wholesome little balls. I swallowed a
box-full without their doing me any
harm."

"How long is it since you swallowed those pills?" asked Fred, with affected solemnity.

"Oh! three weeks ago."

- "And you think they were intended to act upon the imagination? Have they affected yours?"
- "No," said Clara; "but they have taught me a fact."
- "You should have repeated the dose," he said, still smiling, as he looked at her. "Your mother believes in me; I wish you did," he added, turning away with a sigh.
- "Perhaps," she replied, "when I am old and worldly, I may admire what now I only wonder at."
- "Come," said Fred, gently removing the bottle from her hand, "it is not the belief that I am quacking my aunt that moves you thus. I know you too well for that; I know every inflexion of your voice. Lately, you have a special cause of irritation against me. It is not on account of the bread-pills, as you call them."

A mocking reply seemed hovering on

Clara's lips, but she repressed it; then looking straight at her cousin, she said in her abrupt way: "You are different to-night, Fred. I, too, have studied you, and know you, and I know there is something in the background of your thoughts."

"Yes, there is," he replied. "Now," he said, after a pause, walking slowly to the hearth and turning with his back to the fire to face her when she should look at him, "let us have our explanation out."

Her habitual refractoriness towards him had returned.

- "No," she said; "I don't feel angry."
- "Then it is the very time to have it out with me," said Fred.
- "Not a bit of it. It suits me to be saucy now and then, just for a relief."
- "A relief to some peculiar feeling—name it?"
  - "Well," said Clara, "if you will have it,

for loss of a better word I call it by the one I used before—wonder."

"Wonder, at what?"

"Wonder, at your whole conduct," she said, with sudden quickness. "You are a clever man, and you know it. You won the gold medal at the university; you were ambitious to make a name for yourself in the scientific world. You were full of plans to do all this. Your proper place is London; you know it. Then why do you remain here, dawdling, idling, quacking—doing the work of a parish doctor one hour; of a steward another? What is your object?"

"My object is that—that which you set for me—to make the name of Saville dear in Fareham. I am not ashamed that my love should stimulate my work."

For the first time there was a trembling calm in his voice.

A slight frown knit Clara's brow; then her

face softened into an expression of regret. She hesitated, she walked to the window, paused, then turning she went over to his side.

"Fred," she said, gently, "I may have been unjust to you. I have been unkind, I know; but, you see, something has been wrong in our intercourse. Something has, more or less, been always wrong. You are not to blame. It has been my fault all along. But, dear Fred, suppose I told you"—she hesitated—"suppose I asked you"—

"Ask me nothing!" answered Fred, sharply, in a voice that once more to his own ears did not sound like his own.

"But I must ask you," said Clara with a deeper intonation. "It is because I have kept down, held back, feelings—that I have been mean and fault-finding—that I have indulged in unjust, unloyal, uncousinly suspicions."

"Still," said Fred, seeking to speak steadily, "I beg of you to ask nothing of me that will in any way tend to alter our intercourse. You yourself appointed the time for a decision, if you remember, last May. That time has not yet come. I only now bind you to the period you fixed. It is absolutely necessary for me to have it. I may yet win what I long for in it; and," with a sudden heightening of his voice — "I may nullify the schemes of others."

"What do you mean?" she asked, looking him full in the face and her colour changed a little.

"I will tell you," replied Fred, labouring to be very calm. "We have had one side of the explanation out; now for mine. For all your faults, Clara,"—he went on, approaching her, and looking at her fondly; his eyes had the seared look perceptible in

eyes after nights of watching—"you have something of the angel; the clippings of an angel's wings."

- "I do not see how this bears on the subject," she answered, intently watching him.
- "You have pity!" he replied, not noticing her interruption. "It is your strength and your weakness. Sit down; I will tell you what I mean. I know," he went on, "that you have been in the habit of meeting Mr. Latheby in the organ-loft of the church; indeed!" he said, raising his eyes and meeting hers, "that you have become his pupil."
  - "How do you know it?" she asked.
- "Never mind," he answered; "there has been no spying in the matter."
- "May I ask," said Clara, "if I am the first person to whom you have spoken of this knowledge, or have you talked of it to my mother?"

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The two looked straight at each other; Fred slightly quivering; Clara upright, fearless, hotly questioning.

- "You are the first, and you will be the only person, to whom I shall speak of it. I believe," he went on with forced calm, "that you have been entrapped and made the victim of a plot."
  - "What plot?" she asked.
- "This endeavour to win your sympathies, and to compromise you by clandestine meetings, is another branch of the deeply-laid scheme of these people to get back the Towers."
- "I do not understand you," she said curtly.
- "It is just as well that you should not; but I see what you cannot see. Mr. Latheby's letter to your mother was the first move in their altered game. They have gone subtly to work, for they have certainly won

you over. You are too good, too innocent, to see it all."

"It happens that you are wrong in all your conjectures. It was I who went uninvited to the organ-loft," she answered boldly, meeting his eyes, but a blush rising to her cheek. "If you wish to know all, I bribed Simeon to let me in. I wished to hear Mr. Latheby play. It was I asked him, and obtained his reluctant consent, to become his pupil."

"May I ask, do you pay him for his lessons?"

"That is entirely beside the question," she answered, restraining herself, for she detected a latent sneer in his tone. "Yet I will answer it. I would not insult Mr. Latheby by offering him money. I receive his instructions as from a friend. Yes; from a friend. I was unjust to him once. I am so no longer."

"As a friend! Yet he has not even called once here upon you or upon my aunt."

"And why should he call here? Why should I ask him?" she answered, rapidly. "When you know that to do so would only expose him to being sneered at—the 'blind heir of the Lathebys turned music-master.'"

"I think you forget," said Fred, with a pang of sickening jealousy at his heart, "that at one time no one was bitterer than yourself against him; you were witty in finding nicknames for him."

"I remember it, and I regret it—I regret it," she answered, pale, her eyes dilated with tears. "It is generous of you to remind me of my injustice now that I feel it such!"

"Time will show you were right then and you are wrong now!" said Fred, with exasperating deliberation. "When you dubbed him the 'Young Pretender' you chose a good name for him. He is a pretender, with one single object in view. It is my duty to save you from his manœuvres."

Hot anger gained Clara's heart. It was something of the blind tumult of passion that had seized her when as a child her sacred Treasures were profaned, and one her loyal little heart had loved was jeered at.

"How can you speak so of an absent man? You do not know him. You would not appreciate him if you did."

A tear fell; she flicked it angrily away. "If," she went on in a low voice, and with quivering emphasis, "there be plotting and scheming, it is you who plot and lay your traps. I have watched you, and know you."

- "How do I plot?" he asked.
- "How?" she repeated; the pent-up bitterness and impatience bursting out at

last. "You do it so cleverly it is difficult to track you out. Why do you play up to all my mother's prejudices?—to all her whims and fancies, be they just or unjust? Why do you seek to make yourself so necessary to her, that she has no place in her heart, no thought for any one but you? Is it philanthropy alone; or is there no catering for popularity in your work amongst the tenants?"

"I shall not answer your charges. They may be true. They are, if you mean that I never do an act or think a thought that in some way does not bear upon the central hope and purpose of my life. If this be a sin, I acknowledge it. If this be plotting and scheming, I stand by it. I shall win you if I can. God help me?"

"By fair means or foul!" said Clara, casting a look upon Fred that had a physical effect upon him; he felt as if a lash were

laid upon his cheek. "By manœuvring to take my rights from me, and get yourself made heir of the Towers."

She had no sooner said this than she repented it, but her anger would not let her retract.

"Some one has used those words of me to you. They would not come to you alone," said Fred. "It cannot be the servants."

As he spoke he laid a detaining hand upon her, for she seemed to wish to leave him. "I am not in the habit of talking of such matters to servants," she answered. "Let me go; you hurt me."

He knew his light grasp was not hurting her, and he did not relax his hold. He was silent a minute, then he bent his eyes on a level with hers, and gazing straight into them—"Is it your teacher, Mr. Latheby?"

"I shall not answer your question," she

said with a rising sob. "There, let me go," and with a quick jerk she liberated herself from his hand.

Till that moment Fred had loved and hoped, but now hope perished, or seemed to perish. When Clara tore herself away he remained sitting still, his elbow resting on the table, one hand clenched and pressed against his forehead. After the first turbulent and confused moment, when he realized how she misjudged him, Fred began to look along the only track of Clara's nature that would serve as a clue to him in this labyrinth of misery. It was through the sainted weakness of compassion that she had sinned against him. Hillier's description of those meetings in the organ-loft made it all plain to him. Cecil Latheby's blindness and poverty had won her. Neither he nor his father had been above using them for the purpose of enlisting her sympathy. It had

been easy then, by slight but continual disparaging of an imaginary rival, to waken her contempt and dig an abyss between them. Fred forgave Clara; he felt it hard to forgive himself for having deceived himself so long; but he felt implacable against Cecil, and he resolved to meet him and withstandhim to his face. "To make capital of his infirmity makes his conduct more ignoble; yet I shall not forget that he is blind," he muttered.

When, at midnight, a sleepy servant looked in as a reminder that he was waiting up to put out the lights, Fred was still sitting as Clara had left him. He got up now, and went out.

He did not go home; he went out into the country. The ample moonlight still lay over the fields, the glens, the sea; every little wild-flower in his path was visible, pale and glistening with dew. Fred walked out of

Fareham. He passed farms, where the golden and white kine slept kneeling under the sombre trees, and where he could distinguish the sheep huddling close in their folds.

He climbed a hill, and all the village lay at his feet, the new ugly houses, their slate roofs shining like frosted silver in the hoar moonlight; he could distinguish every thatched homestead, forming a mass of shadow, with its surrounding orchard. Beyond, closing the picture, brooded the massive greyness of the Towers. The silence was peopled by the grasshopper chirping merrily afield, and ever and anon a night bird sent forth his mysterious note.

Through the night, long after the moon had set, Fred trudged heavily on. To-night, he knew his love was hopeless. In that love, which had been the inner principle of all his actions, the source of vital activity to him, he now discerned a seed of death to all

the ennobling purposes of life. Sometimes he determined to expel it, as he would virus from his blood, and with that resolve came an anticipation of freedom—a large hope, that when this coil about his heart was loosened, he might think, and work, and sleep, with pleased and satiated pride, in a life of good and useful work. But even as he realized his liberty, the restless, miserable craving rose and overcame him, and the future seemed objectless that contained no Clara for him to win and work for.

## CHAPTER XI.

Pierre. "No more I'll hear; no more. Begone, and leave me!

Jaffier. Not hear me! By my sufferings, but you shall!

Venice Preserved.

SIMEON, next morning, was playing the fiddle for Jimmy. Fred's prescription of making music an important element in treating the lad, had given a new impulse to Simeon's powers of improvisation. He had faith in the doctor, and in his fiddle, and he was actively taking his share in Jimmy's cure. Inspired by love for the boy, he improvised as continuously, as easily, with as little science, as a mother improvises stories for her child. The structure of the composition was as artless and simple as that of the babbled tale. In his striving to reach Jimmy's sleep-

ing soul, Simeon's musical resources became unlimitedly varied, suave and fresh, imbued with some of the subline simplicity of the music of the woods. All the time he played he watched Jimmy. With one side of his long pointed face couched on the violin, his shaggy eye-brows raised and contracted, his keen eyes fixed on his boy, a slight tremour of the lips indicating the emotion that swayed him, Simeon was not unlike what we might imagine one of those half-possessed, half-simple beings to have been, who in old times were believed to have power to charm away evil spirits by their strains. If Jimmy recognized a tune, laughed, wagged his head, or turned up his ear to a new melody, Simeon's narrow chest would dilate with a heave of triumph, and his eyes would sparkle under the elevated angle of his more firmly puckered eyebrows.

This morning he had been particularly

fortunate. He had chosen a strongly accentuated theme; brisk, pastoral, joyous. haps, to refined ears, it might have seemed rustic and somewhat vulgar, the embodied sense of life in a farm; but the strain appealed to Jimmy. After a few repetitions it caught his ear, and looking up he laughed the discordant laugh that thrilled Simeon. suddenly, after wagging his head, he leapt up, and began to jump and perform uncouth gambols about the room, that yet kept a sort of rhythmic measure with the violin; it was the first intelligent responsive following of Simeon's music. With Jimmy's mirth that of the fiddle grew; it trolled, it whistled, it carolled, it became the expression of careless, exuberant life.

"That's right; dance and play. Why we'll have Jimmy keeping time like a metronome," said Fred, who had come in unnoticed, and was standing by the door.

"It's the first time he's done it, sir," said Simeon, putting down his violin, and trembling a little. His eyebrows were knitted and lifted to the highest angle they could reach. "It's the first time," he repeated, taking out his handkerchief; and rolling it up into a ball he began mopping his forehead by thumping over it, taking the opportunity to thump it over his eyes on its way.

"It's a great progress. I congratulate you, Hillier. That fiddle of yours has done wonders. Why, Jimmy, we'll make a man of you—your father will be proud of you yet," said Fred, putting his hand on Jimmy's head.

The cheery chords of Fred's voice were hushed, but that of sympathy throbbed through it still. Jimmy's face showed a pale, vague pleasure at the sound of it.

"Doctor!" said Simeon, striking his knee with his clenched hand and shaking his head. "It's wonderful! It's like making a soul come back willy-nilly when it's slipped half out of the body; coaxing it to come back as you would a child, who's run away to—to the edge of a precipice. First you send a string of music after it, and there it stops—to listen; and then you point to the pretty things close by—and it dallies to look—and at last—you lay your hand on it—and lead it home—and lock it in. Its home's the body, that was all dark without it, but gets all bright to receive it."

"Well, Hillier, it's not unlike that," said Fred, smiling; "only we must have patience—plenty of patience—for it's a ticklish thing to lay hold of a soul, as you say, and coax it gently back."

"Very ticklish, Doctor — very ticklish," repeated Simeon, slowly, shaking his head with portentous gravity. "It might come near, you see—you put out your hand to catch it—but you do it—too sudden—too

quick—and away it flies!" Simeon lifted his hands with a jerk, and spread them to illustrate the soul's escape.

"Just so," said Fred; "we must trust to the fiddle's voice more than to anything to coax it back. You'll do it—patience, love, music, can work marvels."

"We'll do it—the fiddle's a wonderful thing," Hillier began, with a nod of elation; but glancing up at the Doctor he forgot the thread of his discourse. Fred looked ill; his dress was careless. As Simeon looked at him the sparkle left his pinched face. "You look but poorly, Doctor," he said.

Fred assured the old man he was all right.

"No, Doctor, no; you're poorly—you're ill; you're not the man you were yesterday; you're taking over-care of the cottagers. Bless you, Doctor!" Simeon burst out, rumpling up his queer face; "it would be you, II.

like swopping an organ against a penny whistle for you to give up your life for those folk yonder."

Fred declared he had no intention of making so bad a bargain of his life, and vowed, moreover, he would not die till he had made a man of Jimmy; "till the lad's grown to be sharp as a solicitor."

As Fred was leaving he turned, and smoothing the crown of his hat with his coat-sleeve, he said, carelessly: "By the way, Hillier, to-day's Tuesday—and Tuesday, I think, you said was one of Mr. Latheby's days for practising in the organ-loft."

"So it is, Doctor. Jimmy goes for him, and at three punctual he'll be there."

"Well, I'll just drop in. I've a few words to say to him—a slight matter of business. Now don't go making parables about it—no parables you know, Hillier," said Fred, with a forced laugh.

"No, sir; no parables," answered Simeon, slowly.

"Ill drop in then; so don't lock me out.

Mind, there's no need to say anything about it beforehand." Fred nodded and departed.

A minute after his head was at the door: "My cousin comes on Tuesday—soon after Mr. Latheby?"

"She's due at four, for her lesson; but bless you, she more often than not comes sooner. She sits still as a ghost listening to his playing—and no wonder."

"Quite so; I understand," said Fred, retreating.

After the Doctor left, Simeon took up his fiddle and drew the bow meditatively and plaintively across the strings. The melody was vague and wistful. It meandered dreamily along. Jimmy sitting in the sunshine threading some shells, occasionally muttering disconnectedly to himself, took no heed of it.

Suddenly Simeon stopped and flourished his bow above his head. "I've got it!" he cried; and returning to his violin he confided to it with various jerks and strikings his exultation at the discovery. Jimmy looked up, and, as the gleeful sounds continued, laughed aloud. But soon the melody became puzzled and troubled again, and Jimmy listened no more to it.

"As if I did not know what was the matter with him," said Simeon to himself on his way to the church some hours after. "He pretends it's nothing; and I thought, at first, it's the cottagers; but it's not the cottagers—it's something else—it's what I told him of Mr. Latheby and Miss Clara. It's as plain, reading his truthful face, as to know when the damp is in the fiddle-strings; and now, the thing to be done is to make it right for him. And the way to do that, I take it, is to make things plain to Mr. Latheby

before the Doctor comes to have a talk with him; and that's what I'll do, to the best of my ability."

Simeon set his under-jaw firm and walked briskly forward. He had sent Jimmy a little before the usual time to Cecil, and just before three they entered the organ-loft together. A change has come over Cecil since we last saw him sitting in his place before the organ. An under-current of brightness gives a light to the blind face. He carries his head higher; the mouth seems more flexible—sooner ready to break into smiles.

Simeon had been revolving in his head how he could approach the subject he had determined to broach. Cecil gave him this opportunity by saying encouragingly, "Jimmy's not the lad he was; he brought my sister a necklace of shells to-day, so daintily strung together; and as we came

along he told me the habits of some birds he has been watching."

"It's the Doctor's doing," cried Simeon—then he came to a sudden stand-still.

"Doctor Raikes. He must be a remarkable man to have brought about this change in such a short time," said Cecil.

"Remarkable!" burst out Simeon; "he's like one of the apostles. He'd loose the tongue of the dumb, and make the blind to see (forgetting Cecil's blindness in his zeal); and when I see him and thinks of it all, I say he deserves his sweetheart for wife."

"His sweetheart! who is she?"

"Miss Saville, sir; there's not another one worthy of him but her."

For half a minute or so Cecil remained quite still; then turning to the organ, he said quietly: "Indeed, are Mr. Raikes and Miss Saville engaged?"

"They're to be man and wife; God made

them for each other," blurted Simeon, with emphasis.

It seemed to him that Mr. Latheby's features grew more sharp and defined. It came into his mind that Mr. Latheby looked like one dead, so quiet and stern with those sightless eyes, as without another word he began to play.

Scarce had the chords of the organ filled the church, when a step was heard outside, and the door opened, and Fred stood in the loft. Not waiting for the doctor's sign, Simeon took up his hat and hurriedly departed. Cecil stopped playing, and rising with a gesture of impatience, faced the intruder.

"I am Doctor Raikes," began Fred abruptly. He looked unshorn and haggard enough now that the need of affecting light-heartedness was over. Cecil stood a few paces from him in an attitude of distant courtesy, waiting for an explanation of this

interruption. Fred eyed his blind foe. He was so handsome; there was an expression of such intellect and power in the young countenance, with the piteous blank under the brows, where all the buoyant light should have been focussed; that for one heart-beat Fred was never so moved to feel compassionately towards any man, but by the next his anger was all the more violently stirred. He spoke calmly, however.

"I must apologise for thus intruding upon you; I come upon a matter of importance to myself."

Cecil bowed. "I am at a loss to imagine in what matter of importance I can be of service, and I confess I am surprised at receiving a visit in a place and at an hour I particularly wish to reserve free from interruption."

"I think you will admit that intrusion into a man's private life and a mis-statement of his motives, are more serious than an

interruption of his hour of recreation," exclaimed Fred sternly.

Cecil lifted his head. "I do not understand; I cannot conceive the drift of your remark."

There was all the concentrated nature of the blind man in Cecil's tones and words; the defence against the unseen antagonist. Fred spoke as one who saw before him the one from whom he took his wounds.

"I think," he said, looking down on the pews, the pulpit, the altar, and feeling the contrast of the quietness and the prayerful associations around him with the turbulence within him, "that we had better finish what we have to say outside the church;" and then quickly correcting himself, "Fear no violence from me."

"Fear!" repeated Cecil, and he paused. There was no scorn, or bravado, or wonder in his tone—no more comprehension of fear in it than in a child's looking at a cloud. Dropping the suggestion as a nothing, he continued, with the same self-possession: "There is no need to go out; I have no clue to the motive of this strange interview. What can there possibly be between us?" All the pride of his nature was up resentfully. As he spoke he sat down, and Fred took a seat also.

"I wish," said Fred, labouring to put a restraint on himself, "that what I must say should be said in a not unfriendly form. In consideration of many things I would not express myself to you as I would to others under similar provocation."

"If it is to my infirmity you allude, dismiss that from your thoughts. It is nothing to the purpose here. Pray allow nothing in my position to check the full explanation of your last words to me," said Cecil, with some haughtiness.

"Well then," said Fred, still labouring hard for calm, but his voice quivering a little, "I shall put it in this way. You are under a total misconstruction as to my character and motives. I suppose you know to what I refer?"

"I do not; speak out what you mean; come to the point," said Cecil, with a quick and somewhat awkward gesture of the hand over his eyes habitual to him when excited, as if to brush away some blinding gossamer: "I lead a quiet and occupied life, and I cannot conceive, sir, how anyone should connect me with meddling or slander, if that is what you would suggest."

"I am relieved to find that plainness is necessary. It is my custom to be plain, and I understand it better," burst out Fred. "Well then, I am given to understand that you ascribe interested motives to my conduct; that you sneer at my professional

engagements as work done with a purpose; that you spoke this to some one."

"I spoke—this—to some one!" said Cecil, slowly. "To whom?"

"You know," said Fred. "I do not want you to pain yourself by any confidence; but I want you to hear this once for all——"

"I will not hear it," said Cecil, with sudden loudness. "I never spoke of you, or thought of you; either you or I are dreaming."

"I believe my informant," said Fred.

"You thought so, and said so. I could pardon your silence, but I disbelieve your denial."

"Sir; I deny nothing," said Cecil, "because I know of nothing between us. The sound of your voice is honest; and if it relieves you, I will hear anything you have to tell me—if you will then kindly leave me alone, and never address me again."

"It sickens me to repeat those details—those falsehoods. You said that I attended on my aunt—that I quacked her—in order to enter into a sick lady's good graces, and to be made heir of the Towers. You said that, in attending to the labourers, I was pandering for popularity. It's a falsehood, sir; a dastardly falsehood."

Fred was almost incoherent with agitation. He had forgotten where he was. He had started up, his face flushed, his fist clenched.

As he paused, Cecil rose, his eyes calmly and blankly gazing at nothing, turned in the direction of the words. With a moral courage, in which there was no action, he stood so for a few seconds, and then he turned to go. As he turned he slightly tripped. Fred made a rapid, instinctive movement forward, when a woman's figure suddenly interposed.

There had been a witness to the closing

part of this scene. Clara, standing petrified in the doorway, had heard Fred's last words. She had watched his fierce bearing and Cecil's undaunted mien. She now saw Fred's arm extended. She thought it was raised to strike; and rushing forward, she placed herself between the two men.

"Ah!" she cried, addressing Fred, "I heard you. I saw you. You were going to strike him — blind, defenceless — here, in church. He listened to you with calm bravery. You have taxed him with false-hood. He told none. He never said a word about it. He never talked about you. It was I thought it; it was I said it. I alone! I alone!

Those words followed each other, swift, strong, like the lashes of a whip; and they entered as plugs of lead into Fred's heart.

The rest of that angry scene was silence; then Fred went quietly out, and Clara was seized with a very womanly fit of tears. "Hush!" said Cecil, with a little soothing action of the hand on her arm.

"Ah!" she sobbed, "what will you think of me? I let him believe you said it of him—you who are above speaking or thinking evil of any one."

"Hush!" said Cecil, still with that soothing action of the hand.

"But, you see, he is so clever," continued Clara, with a big sob. "No one can sway him when he has a purpose in view. I know it. I know it. I have watched him. He never leaves my mother alone. He makes himself everything to her. I have no chance to get her to love me. I am nowhere with her. Last night I told him he had a purpose. He would not believe it was my own thought, and he plied me with questions. He asked if it was you who had said this to me. I would not answer him;

it seemed an insult to you, even to stoop to deny it. He interpreted my silence as he wished. Don't think about it any more." "Won't you forgive me?" she added, with a sudden change of tone:

"Poor fellow!" said Cecil, gently. "Then he was not in fault."

"He thinks more of him than of me," murmured Clara in her jealous heart.

"Will you pardon the question? Are you engaged to Doctor Raikes? To-day, I heard you were," said Cecil, abruptly.

"No; I am not," she answered faintly but decisively. "I gave him a kind of promise that, when I was of age, I would think about it. Don't speak of it. The thought of it grows more painful every day to me. I cannot—I cannot care for him. I know I ought to try to do so. It is my mother's wish; but I cannot."

"We cannot have a lesson to-day; so I

shall play to you," said Cecil, in the same abrupt tone he had used before, rising and going to the organ.

He played, until Simeon's head thrust itself in through the door.

"Good-bye," said Clara, standing up to go. "I am afraid—perhaps—I may not be able to come again—next week—or—for some time. But will you expect me on my days as usual? I shall come, when I can."

"I shall expect you," he answered, holding her hand. "But if it be the last time—God bless you!"

## CHAPTER XII.

"My only love, sprung from my only hate,
Too early seen unknown, and known too late;
Prodigious birth of love it is to me,
That I must love a loathed enemy."

Romeo and Juliet.

AFTER Fred had left the church, he felt regret for the insults he had heaped upon Cecil. His jealous heart could not refuse its testimony to this proud nature's incapability of scheming or under-handedness. He had thought of waiting on Cecil to apologize, but he deferred the interview.

When the confession passed Clara's lips that the charge brought against him was the growth of her own heart, a hope that still lingered perished in his. Again he determined to put away the thought of her,

as he would tear up a letter and cast the fragments into the fire. He loved her, or he thought he loved her, no more; but with the re-action, the energy of his nature seemed to leave him. Fred sank into utter depression. He became a changed man. He looked ill, and grew careless in his dress. The last place he cared to visit was the Towers, yet he haunted them. He had voluntarily given his word to Clara that he would not tell of those meetings with Cecil Latheby, and he kept his pledge. He chose his opportunity, however. On the evening of the encounter, when Clara was out of the room, he gently but earnestly rebuked his aunt for allowing her daughter too much liberty. He pointed out to her that she was young, beautiful, rich; that she was ardent, generous, impatient of control—just the nature to become the prey of some clever adventurer. He admitted some remarks

had been made on her unconventional habits. Mrs. Saville took alarm, and was quickly Clara's movements converted to his views. were checked and hampered. Fred ordered his aunt carriage exercise, and Mrs. Saville insisted every afternoon on the companionship of her daughter in the stuffy yellow coach. She put a summary end to Clara's lessons to the choir; and invited one of her old governesses to spend her holidays at the Towers, and be a companion to her daughter in her walks. It was the hardest trial to Clara. She suffered, proudly submitted, but she resented the interference. knew from what quarter it came. Her first thought was that Fred had told all to her mother; but she soon became convinced that Mrs. Saville was ignorant of the meetings in the organ-loft. "It is like him, to hold back his motive and yet set deliberately to work to achieve his purpose," she

said to herself, unjustly forgetting his promise.

She ignored Fred's presence as much as possible when they were thrown together, and their intercourse was disagreeable and superficial. But an unforeseen turn of events forced them once more into close contact. Within a fortnight Mrs. Saville was attacked by a sudden and dangerous illness. was devoted in his attendance upon her. He did his work of pity with something like piteousness in his own heart. Clara helped to nurse her mother, and then it was that Fred saw her in a gentle light. This illness, so swift, so dangerous, so different from the chronic ailments to which her mother was subject, roused all that was womanly in She feared her mother was dying; then nature, great and mournful, woke in her heart, hushed all its petulance and impatience, touched all the springs of memory, pity, and tenderness. When Fred saw her thus ingenious in comforting; when he listened to her voice, so tender in its modulations that he had heard so harsh and cold; when at night he watched her at her post in the dim light, reclining in a chair, pale, motionless, one long tress of hair falling over her white dress, then something like despair seized him. His face grew deeplined in its expression of suffering and controlled passion. This was succeeded by a fierce egotism laying hold of him. He would win her yet—this cruel, unjust, pitiful, beautiful woman. By fair means or foul, as she had accused him, it mattered not, he would get her. The calumnies that she had heaped upon him, he would deserve He would manœuvre to be made heir of the Towers. This darling home that she delighted in, of which she was so proud; if she would have it and keep it, she

must marry him. When he had won her, Fred felt that by his idolatry he would earn her love.

This resolve became the fountain-head of inspiration to him. He doubled his care and his tenderness to his aunt. He developed unlooked-for resources of skill in treating Night and day he was at his post. It was a combat with death, and he never slackened his vigilance. One night in the third week he almost broke down. Clara laid her hand on his arm, and asked him to take some rest. There was an expression in her face, a little tremulousness about the lips, a little shy repentance in the eyes, that had something of the old look when she was a child and she had been unjust to him and came to make amends. At this advance, Fred felt as if some gleam of summer had come into his life again.

During those three weeks, all that was

best in Clara was stirred. She and Fred did the principal nursing. She would often sit, looking at her mother's pale face through tears, and her heart would grow full of kind words and kind deeds.

To the tension of her nerves there came a sinister relief. It came after one bitter, dreadful scene she never forgot. The perfume of a certain kind of vinaigrette Mrs. Saville was fond of, and which permeated the sick room, always brought back that scene to Clara. She would see again the dark chamber with the heavy curtains drawn; the table with the medicine bottles; the dull books of controversial theology in their monotonous bindings, which her mother collected around her; and, standing among them, the miniature of her baby-brother. She would see the marble bust of her grandfather glimmering through the dusk; the flowers she had gathered and brought in

from the conservatory. She would see the big bed, with its sombre canopy and hangings, and her mother's face lying on the white pillows, as if modelled in yellow wax.

Mrs. Saville had been a little wandering in the morning. By impatient signs she had asked that a ray of garish daylight that had stolen in should be shut out. Suddenly she had broken out into talk. She had given directions for dinner; she had addressed Fred, and then looking at Clara she had smiled. After a silence she had begun to hum to her. Clara listened. It was actually that little French song her father used to sing. She did not know her mother had ever given any heed to it. Crooning it weakly to herself the sick woman went to sleep:

"J'ai encore i tel pasté, Qui n'est mie de lasté, Que nous mangerons Marote, Bec à bec, et moi et vous—" A few hours after Fred went to take a stretch on the sofa in the next room, Clara dismissed the hired nurse and remained alone. She had kissed her mother softly for remembering that little song, and dropped some tears on the troubled forehead. As she was trying to remember the words of another ballad her father had taught her in those never-forgotten interviews in the dressing-room of a morning, Mrs. Saville opened her eyes and beckoned her to come closer.

"I have been talking a little wildly; I could not help it," she whispered. "But now I remember what I have to say." Clara came closer. "Is Fred resting?" asked Mrs. Saville.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Yes," said Clara.

<sup>&</sup>quot;That's right," murmured the sick woman; and a little smile of tenderness flitted across her face.

She paused; not because she had relaxed her hold of what she had to say. The intelligence in her eyes showed that she had a distinct idea of what she had to communicate; her mind was sounding like a seashell with old hopes and present anxieties; but physical weakness, and the press of emotions urging themselves upon her, checked the flow of expression. At last she signed with her hand—"Henry's miniature," she whispered.

Clara brought from the table the velvet-framed portrait of her little brother who had died twenty years ago, and who had been the single being Mrs. Saville had loved until Fred came. The mother took the miniature and looked at the brave, chubby, open-eyed boy face over which she had shed so many tears and kisses; that for years had lain at night under her pillow, and whose memory still she loved.

"How like still!—how like!" murmured Mrs. Saville. "He would have grown up just what Fred is. The same kind eyes and open brow. He would have been tender-hearted, clear-headed, handsome, like Fred." Then turning to Clara: "I have found it very hard to talk to you, but you must listen to me; you must consent to answer."

Clara moved her hands restlessly, and set her lips a trifle more firmly. She had always manœuvred so deftly to avoid the discussion that she knew now was coming; she was as slippery as an eel at its approach. Mrs. Saville had always been obliged to put off the contention, and so the matter had gone on between them.

"Fred has behaved to me in this time of sinking and shadow as you, Clara, would scarcely be able to understand. Oh! his conduct has been noble!" whispered Mrs. Saville.

"I think," said Clara, "you love him better than me."

She did not waive the bitter subject now; the long-stifled jealousy of her mother's preference; this jealousy so long smothered by pride now broke into flame.

"Not better—the same," said Mrs. Saville, turning her eyes upon Clara, and putting out her dry thin hand upon the soft moist one. It was like a withered leaf enfolding a blossom. "I never separate you in my thoughts; you are always one to me. Don't you know," she went on, looking into Clara's eyes, "there is a wish in my mind; and don't you know what that wish is?"

"You ought not to talk, mamma," said Clara, quickly.

"Clara, that is an attempt at evasion. You have good qualities; no one appreciates them more than I do; but I don't think you are always truthful, and now the time

has come for truth. You know what I wish?"

"I had rather, mamma, that you told me; and yet you ought not to talk. Fred would not let you," said Clara, with a little gulp.

"It's of Fred I want to talk, dear; thoughtful, tender-hearted Fred! What should I have done but for him these years? I can no more delay talking about it. Your marriage with him, as you know well, has been my hope, my thought, my prayer, these many years."

"I cannot talk of marriage now, mamma. The thought of it at this moment is like a sin," said Clara, abruptly.

"Clara! you shock me; the thought of your marriage to Fred is the cheer of my dying bed," said Mrs. Saville, slowly. "I cannot get him to say I am dying. I believe I am."

Up rose a sob to Clara's throat like the

hammer of a piano to the touch of the finger on the note, and up came the jealous thought; how differently she, the daughter, felt, from reassuring Fred.

- "Do not cry. If you are good and dutiful there is no reason to grieve, Clara."
- "But if I cannot do as you wish, mamma; if I cannot?"

"You can. If I die, it is my wish that you should marry Fred, soon—as soon as possible. You did not tell me; but he told me of your promise, when you are of age to think of it. Marry him then—without delay. Let this justify you in the eyes of those who might censure your haste. It is my desire. It is my wish that you should marry soon."

As Clara made no reply, but by a louder sob, the sick woman's voice continued feebly but steadily. "I have often feared of late you did not love him. I fancied you were prejudiced against him. But no—you could not be insensible to the beauty and nobleness of his nature. The care he has taken of me! His unmurmuring, untiring devotion! Then his goodness to the poor, and how well he manages the property. The rents have gone up since he has taken it in hand. When he's Lord of the Towers, who'll think of the Lathebys then, but to say how much the Savilles surpass them? He'll be richer than they were—richer, more loved.

Here Clara rose abruptly, and made a few steps, pausing at the foot of the bed. It came upon her to attempt to explain to her mother, to endeavour to communicate to her, the pity and sympathy she had for Cecil, but with the intention came the despair. How could she? There was no time. She felt like one standing at the foot of a steep, precipitous mountain, which to ascend was impossible.

After a silence, Mrs. Saville resumed with gathering force: "And then he loves you; not for your fortune, but for yourself. Come, give me your promise. My heart, my mind, my soul, are set upon your early marriage with Fred."

Clara did not move; but she crushed the fingers of her left hand in those of her right. "I cannot promise," she whispered.

"You cannot promise—to marry him at once; is that it?" asked Mrs. Saville, with feeble agitation; trying to raise herself on her elbow, but falling back on her pillows.

"I cannot marry Fred," said Clara, her voice muffled by the beatings of the full-pulsed rebellion of her heart. "I have never loved him. I never can love him. We are not suited. I cannot help it." Then she paused a minute; and resumed, vainly endeavouring to speak calmly: "You did not love papa when you married him, and you know such

a marriage means to be shut out of the reach of happiness for ever; and it is choosing wickedness to choose this deliberately. It is like murdering one's chance of reaching one's best in every way. When you think of your unhappy marriage, mamma, you ought to be full of fears for me—you ought to do all—all—in your power to shield me from such a fate. You ought to wish me to marry a pauper, a cripple, an enemy, if I loved him and he loved me, rather than marry Fred whom I cannot love; and I cannot command love."

"Oh, hear her!" panted Mrs. Saville. The likeness to the old brewer, that always came out in moments of excitement, was very strong just then. "It is not the same case at all—as that of your poor father and me. Now that everything is forgiven, I won't wound your ears and mine—by stating circumstances—painful circumstances

—that carry it out of this case. Oh, dear!" she muttered impatiently to herself, as Clara remained silent: "How like her father she is! His bad strength and his bad weakness!" She paused from sheer exhaustion; then Mrs. Saville gathered all her strength: "I warn you," she said, "it is not only Fred you lose."

On the pinched face the look of power and cunning came out strong. There is no more pitiable sight than, when life is passing away, to see the faint flickering flame, so soon to be blown out of this world, gather up light enough to cast one more gleam of uncharitableness.

"I don't know what I lose," said Clara, struggling still to keep calm, and only confusedly grasping her mother's words. "But whatever may be the consequences, I shall not marry Fred; I shall not bind myself to make an unhappy marriage." The pity and

tenderness that had filled her heart these past days were shivered like glass under the fall of a stone by her mother's look. "You ought to consider Fred," she went on, with a bitter pang of jealousy. "If not for my sake, for his, you ought not to wish our marriage."

Mrs. Saville lifted her feeble hand. "So be it," she said. "I shall consider him."

The calm with which the sick woman said these words was more sinister than the violence which marked the former ones. It was apparently more exhausting also, for she now lay back motionless, seemingly insensible.

Clara called out, and a moment after Fred was bending over the bed.

END OF VOL. II.

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